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THEY WHO WALK IN THE WILDS



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THEY WHO WALK IN THE WILDS

BY
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They Who Walk in the Wilds

MISHI OF TIMBERLINE

THE trail was not only steep and rough, but at the same time slippery with the damp of spring; and the traveller, in that uncertain greyness of earliest dawn, had to pick his way with care. He was nearing the "timberline" after a sharp climb of half a mile from the high but sheltered valley wherein he had made camp the night before. The woods, a monstrous jumble of rocks and trunks, matted shrubs and gnarled, sinister roots which clutched like tentacles for a grip to hold them against the tearing mountain wilds, began to open out before him, and he caught glimpses of the naked mountain face, scarred with tremendous ravines and scrawled across with crooked, dizzy ledges. Far and high, the eternal snows had caught the full flood of the sunrise, and every soaring crag and pinnacle stood bathed in a glory of ineffable pink and saffron.

Merivale stopped, and stood watching, with an impulse to uncover his head, while the transfiguring splendour spread slowly down the steeps.

In his frequent trips from the East he had seen many such miracles of sunrise among the Western mountains, but familiarity had not dulled his senses to them, and he was never able to take the wonder lightly. But as he gazed, the downward wash of that enchanted light suddenly brought into view a shape which set Merivale's pulses leaping and made him straightway forget the sunrise. On the giddy tip of a crag which jutted out from the steep, stood perched a stately mountain ram, his noble head, with its massive, curled horns sweeping backwards over his shoulders, high uplifted as he searched the waste for any sign of danger to his ewes. This was the splendid spring-time game in quest of which Merivale had come up from the foothills with his camera. He crept forward again, stealthily and swiftly, keeping well beneath the cover of the branches.

Suddenly there burst upon his ears a sound which brought him to an instant stop. It was not loud, but as it came muffled through the gloom, there was something monstrous and terrifying about it. The sound came from somewhere above Merivale's head and around to the left of where he crouched. It told him of a desperate struggle, of one of those tremendous battles to the death in which the great beasts of the wild so rarely allow themselves to become involved. There was a heavy crashing and trampling of underbrush, a

clattering of stones displaced by mighty feet, mingled with great, straining grunts and *woofs* of raging effort.

“Grizzlies, fighting,” muttered Merivale with amazement, and stole noiselessly towards the sound, rifle in readiness, eager to catch a glimpse of so titanic a duel. Then the noise was varied by a single harsh and terrible scream, after which the sounds of struggle went on as before. But now Merivale understood. “No, not grizzlies,” he said to himself. “A grizzly and a puma.” He had heard from the Indians of such tremendous duels, but he had never expected to witness one. His eyes shining with excitement, he hurried forward as quickly as he could without betraying himself. He quite forgot that in such a battle the great antagonists would be much too occupied to give heed to his approach. But it was slow work forcing his way through the rocky tangle, and the scene of the struggle proved to be farther away than he had guessed. Before he could reach the spot, the noise of the battle came abruptly to an end—and there was no sound but a laboured, slobbery panting mixed with a hoarse whining, which gave him an impression of mortal anguish.

The next moment there came into view, lurching and staggering down the slope and blundering into the tree-trunks, a big grizzly, bleeding from head to haunch with ghastly wounds. His

face was literally clawed to ribbons, and he was completely blinded. Mixed by an impulse of mercy, Merivale lifted his rifle and sent a soft-nosed bullet through the sufferer's spine. Then, very cautiously, he followed on up the grizzly's trail to see how it had fared with his antagonist.

Some thirty or forty yards farther on Merivale came upon the puma, lying dead and mangled in the trail, its ribs crushed in and one great foreleg wrenched from its socket. It was a female—clearly a mother in full milk. Merivale's sympathies were all with her, and as he stood looking down upon her and thought of the great fight she had put up against her huge adversary, he understood the whole situation. Obviously the wild mother had had her lair, and her helpless young, in some cleft of the rocks near by. She had seen the giant bear coming up the trail to the den. She had sprung down to meet him and join battle before he should get too near, and had given up her life for the sake of her little ones.

By this time Merivale had lost interest in the mountain sheep. What he wanted was to find the puma kittens, which he had heard were easily tamed. But first, after studying the dimensions of the dead mother, he went back and carefully considered the proportions of the grizzly, pondering till he had reconstructed the whole terrific combat which he had been so unfortunate as to

miss the sight of. Then he set forth to seek the orphaned little ones.

The search was difficult in that precipitous jumble of rocks and undergrowth; but presently the trail of the dead mother, which he had lost on a patch of naked rock lately swept by a landslide, revealed itself to him again. Just then, from almost over his head came an outburst of small but angry spittings, followed by a catlike cry of agony. Furious at the thought that some prowler had reached the defenceless nest ahead of him, Merivale sprang forwards and swung himself recklessly up on the ledge where the noises came from.

There, straight before him, in a shallow, sheltered cave with the sunrise just flooding full into it, was the puma's lair. The picture stamped itself in minutest detail on Merivale's memory. One puma kitten, about the size of a common tabby, lay outstretched dead. A big red fox was just worrying a second to death, having seized it too near the shoulders and so failing to break its neck at the first snap. The third and last kitten was spitting and growling, and clawing manfully but futilely at the thick rich fur of the slaughterer. It was evident that the battle between the grizzly and the mother puma had been watched by the fox, who, as soon as he saw the result, had realized that it would now be quite safe for him to visit the undefended den and capture an easy prey.

Filled with wrath, but afraid to shoot lest he should kill the remaining kitten, Merivale bounded forward with a yell and aimed a vindictive kick at the assassin. Needless to say, he missed his mark. He just saved himself from falling, and staggered heavily against the wall of the den, while the fox, not stopping to argue the matter and present his own point of view, slipped over the ledge and vanished, an indignant red streak, through the bushes.

Merivale eased his feelings with a few vigorous curses, then turned his attention to the valiant little survivor, which had backed away against the rock wall and was spitting and snarling bravely at the new foe. In colour differing greatly from its unmarked grey-tawny mother, it was of a bright yellowish fawn, variegated with dark brown, almost black, spots; and its long tail—just now curled round in front of it and twitching defiantly—was ringed like a raccoon's with the same dark shade. Merivale, full of benevolence, reached out his hand to it gently, with soothing words such as he might have used to an angry but favoured cat. He got a vicious scratch from the furry baby paw.

"Plucky little hellion," he muttered approvingly as he sucked the blood, with scrupulous care, from the wounds, realizing that those baby claws might be far from innocent hygienically. Then, taking off his thick jacket, he dexterously caught

the battling infant in its folds, rolling it over and over and swaddling down those rebellious claws securely, and leaving only the tiny black and pink muzzle free to spit its owner's indomitable protests. With a bit of twine from his pocket he lashed the squirming bundle safely, but with tender consideration for the comfort of its occupant, tucked it under his arm, and turned to retrace his steps down to his camp in the valley. Then it suddenly occurred to him that by and by the fox would return to the den for his prey. Being absurdly angry with that fox, he took the trouble to carry off the two dead kittens, tying them together and slinging them to his belt. His purpose was to throw them into the torrent which brawled down the valley, in order to make quite sure the fox should not profit by his kill.

For about a day the spotted youngster was irreconcilable; but hunger and Merivale's tactful handling soon brought it to terms. It took kindly to a diet of condensed milk, well diluted with warm water, and varied by a little raw rabbit or venison. It thrived amazingly, and by the time Merivale was ready to break camp and move back to his ranch on the skirt of the foothills, it was as tame as a house-cat and as devoted to its master as a terrier.

Merivale maintained his ranch in the Western foothills—which was run the year round by a

highly competent foreman—chiefly as an excuse for a long summer's holiday and hunting. It was not till near the end of September that he started back for his home in Nova Scotia, taking his puma cub with him. The cub, now nearly six months old, was approaching his full stature, and was a peculiarly fine specimen of his race. Having by this time lost the dark markings which adorn all puma cubs at their birth, he was of a beautiful golden fawn all over the upper parts, and creamy white beneath, with a line of darker hue along his backbone, and a brown tip to his long and powerful tail. His ears and nose were black, which gave a finish to his distinguished colouring. In length he was close upon seven feet, counting his two-foot-six tail. His height at the shoulder was a little under two feet. In his play, which was always gentle, thanks to Merivale's wise training, he was the embodiment of lithe, swift strength. His savage inherited instincts having been lulled to sleep or else never awakened, he was on the best of terms with all the dwellers upon the ranch, whether human or otherwise, the cattle alone excepted. These latter could never endure the sight or the smell of him. Very early in his career he had learned to regard them as his implacable enemies, and to keep carefully out of their way.

With the children on the ranch—there were

four of them, belonging to the foreman—he was particularly popular; and to one, a long-legged little girl of about eleven, he was almost as devoted as to Merivale himself. She was alternately his playmate and his tyrant.

The name which Merivale had bestowed upon his pet was “Mishi-Pishoe,” the word by which the puma or panther is known among the Ojibway Indians. But he was always called “Mishi” for short, and would answer to this name as promptly as a well-trained dog. He would also come to heel for his master, like a dog. In fact, under Merivale’s training he acted much more like a dog than a cat, except that he could purr like an exaggerated cat when pleased, and wag his great tail in nervous jerks when annoyed.

The railway was a good half-day’s journey from Merivale’s ranch, and Mishi, who had never before seen a train, was terrified beyond measure by the windy snortings of the great transcontinental locomotive. He came near upsetting his master in his efforts to get between his legs for protection.

Merivale would have liked to take his favourite into the Pullman with him, but against any such proposal the conductor, out of consideration for the feelings of nervous passengers, was obliged to set his face. The young puma was therefore locked in an empty box-car, with a bed of clean straw, a

supply of food and water, and his favourite plaything, a football, to console him.

But in spite of all this comfort the long, long journey across the continent was a horror to the unwilling traveller. The ceaseless jarring, swaying and roaring of the train set all his nerves on edge. He could only sleep when exhausted by hours of prowling up and down his narrow quarters. He would only eat—and then but a few hasty mouthfuls—when Merivale, at long intervals, came to pay him a hurried visit. For the first time since his outburst of baby fury against the fox in his mountain den, he began to show signs of the savage temper inherited from his sires. He was homesick; he was desperately frightened; and he was unspeakably lonely away from his master. In revenge at last he fell upon the unoffending football, his old plaything, and with great pains and deliberation tore it to shreds.

But as luck would have it, Mishi's journey was brought to an abrupt and unforeseen end. It was late in the night, and Merivale was sleeping soundly in his berth, when the "mixed" train stopped at a lonely backwoods station in the wild country that lies between the St. Lawrence and the northern boundary of New Brunswick. A ragged tramp, seeking to steal a ride, crept noiselessly along the train beyond the station lights, and found

the box-car. He was an old hand and knew how to open it.

But as the door slid smoothly back, the tramp got the shock of his life. Something huge and furry struck him with a force that sent him sprawling clean across the farther rails and over into the ditch. At the same instant the engine snorted fiercely (she was on an up-grade) and the wheels began to turn with a groaning growl. Mishi went leaping off at top speed through the woods, doubly driven by the desire to find his master, and by his terror of the panting, glaring locomotive. Deep in the spruce-woods he crouched down at last, with pounding pulses—while the train with Merivale asleep in his berth, thundered on steadily through the wilderness night.

As Mishi lay there in the chill darkness, his nostrils drinking in the earthy scents of the wet moss and the balsamy fragrances of the spruce and pine, faint ancestral memories began to stir in the young puma's brain, and his pupils dilated as he peered with a kind of savage expectancy through the shadows. He had long, long forgotten utterly the den upon the mountainside, the caresses of his savage mother, and that last desperate battle with the marauding fox. But now dim, fleeting pictures of these things, quite uncomprehended, began to haunt and trouble him, and his long claws sheathed and unsheathed themselves in

the damp moss. Suddenly realizing that he was ravenously hungry, he glanced around on every side, confidently expecting to see his accustomed rations ready to hand. It took him several minutes to convince himself that his expectation was a vain one. Truly, life had changed indeed. He would have to find his food for himself. He rose slowly, stretched himself, opened his jaws in a terrific yawn, and set forth on the novel quest.

And now it was that Mishi's inherited woodlore fully woke up and came effectively to his aid. Instead of crashing his way through the bushes, careless as to who should hear his coming, he crept forwards noiselessly, crouching low and sniffing the night air for a scent which should promise good hunting.

Suddenly he stiffened in his tracks and stood rigid, one paw uplifted. A little animal, clearly visible to his eyes in spite of the darkness, was approaching. Resembling one of those big jack-rabbits which Mishi had often chased (but never succeeded in catching) on the ranch, only much smaller, it came hopping along its runway, unconscious of danger. With an effort Mishi restrained himself from springing prematurely. Quivering with eagerness, for this was his first experience of real hunting, he waited till the rabbit was passing almost under his nose. Then out shot his great paw through the screening leafage, and the prize

was his without a struggle, without so much as a squeak. Filled with elation at this easy success, he made the sweetest meal of his life.

As soon as his hunger was satisfied, a great homesickness and longing for his master came over him. But this, of course, could not be allowed to interfere with his toilet. He licked his jaws and his paws scrupulously, washed his face and scratched his ears like a domestic cat, then crept into the heart of the nearest thicket, curled himself up on the dry, aromatic spruce-needles and went to sleep. It was the first real, refreshing sleep he had enjoyed since leaving the ranch.

The sun was high when Mishi awoke, opening puzzled eyes upon a world entirely novel to him. Interspersed among the dark green fir trees stood a few scattered maples glowing crimson and scarlet in their autumn bravery. These patches of radiant color held Mishi's wandering attention for some moments till his thoughts turned to the more important question of breakfast. Instantly his whole manner and expression changed. He crouched with tense muscles; his eyes flamed and narrowed; his long white teeth showed themselves; and he began to creep noiselessly through the undergrowth, fully expecting another rabbit to come hopping into his path without delay. When this did not happen, he grew angry. He had never

been kept waiting for his breakfast before. There was something very wrong with this new world into which he had been thrust. Lifting up his voice, he gave vent to a harsh and piercing scream, hoping that his master would hear and come to him.

At the sound, with a sudden bewildering *whir-r-r* of wings, a covey of partridges sprang into the air almost from under his nose, and went rocketing off through the trees. Mishi was so startled that he nearly turned a back somersault. Not lingering to investigate the alarming phenomenon, he went racing off in the opposite direction like a frightened house-cat, till his wind began to fail him. Then he huddled himself down behind a rock, craning his neck to peer around it nervously while he brooded over his wrongs.

These, however, were presently forgotten under the promptings of his appetite, and he set forth again on his hungry prowl. Either by chance, or moved by a deep homing instinct, he turned his steps westward. But suddenly from that direction came the long, strident whistle of a train, wailing strangely over the tree-tops. At the sound, to him so fearful and so hateful, Mishi wheeled in his tracks and made off with more haste than dignity in the opposite direction. That dismal note stood to him for the cause of all his misfortunes.

At the bottom of his heart, however, the young puma, as he had shown in babyhood, was valiant and high-mettled. It was only the unknown, the uncomprehended, that held terrors for him. And he was not one to dwell upon his fears. In a few moments he had forgotten them all in the excitement of sniffing at an absolutely fresh rabbit-track. The warm scent reminded him of his last meal. He proceeded to follow up the trail with all stealth, little guessing that the rabbit, its eyes bulging with terror, was already hundreds of yards away and still fleeing. It had never dreamed that its familiar woodlands could harbour such an apparition of doom as this great, tawny, leaping monster with the eyes of pale flame.

It was not in Mishi's instinct to follow a trail long by the scent alone. Speedily growing discouraged, he hid himself beside the runway, hoping that another rabbit would come along. When he had lain there motionless for perhaps ten minutes, his tawny colour blending perfectly with his surroundings, a couple of brown wood mice emerged from their burrows and began to scurry playfully hither and thither among the fir-needles. Mishi never so much as twitched a whisker while he watched them from the corner of his narrowed eyes. At last they came within reach. Out flashed his swift paw, and crushed them both together. They made hardly a mouthful, but it was a tasty

one, and Mishi settled down again to wach hopefully for more.

A few minutes later a red squirrel, one of the most quick-witted and inquisitive of all the creatures of the wild, peering down through the branches, thought that he detected something strange in the shadowy, motionless figure far below. Nearer and nearer he crept, circling noiselessly down the trunk, his big bright eyes ablaze with curiosity, till he was within a couple of yards of Mishi's tail. Then, and not till then, did he catch the glint of Mishi's narrowed eyes fixed upon him, and realize that the shadowy shape was something alive, a new and terrible monster. With a chattering shriek of wrath and fear, he raced up the trunk again, and dancing as if on wires in his excitement, began to shrill out his warning to all the forest dwellers.

In two seconds Mishi was up the tree, gaining the lower branches in one tremendous spring, and scrambling onward like a cat, with a loud rattling of claws. But already the squirrel was several trees away, leaping from bough to bough and shrieking the alarm as he fled. It was taken up by every other squirrel within hearing, and by a couple of impudent blue jays who came fluttering over Mishi's head with screams of insult and defiance. Promptly realizing that there could be no more secrecy for him in this neighbourhood, Mishi

dropped to the ground, and made off at a leisurely lope, pretending to ignore his tormentors. The latter followed him for nearly half a mile, till at last, satisfied with their triumph, they returned to their autumn business of gathering beechnuts for the winter store.

The wanderer was by this time much too ravenous to brood over his discomfiture. He must find something to eat. Resuming his stealthy prowl, he presently came to the edge of a little river, its golden-brown current gleaming and flashing in the sun. He was just about to creep down to it and quench his thirst when he saw a small blackish-brown creature, about the length of a rabbit but shorter in the legs and very slim, emerge from the water and crawl forth upon the bank, dragging after it a glistening trout almost as big as itself.

Mishi had never seen a mink before, but he felt sure the little black animal would serve very well for his breakfast. In this, however, he was mistaken. He little knew the mink's elusiveness. The mighty spring with which he launched himself through the screen of leafage was lightning-swift, but when he landed, the mink had vanished as completely as a burst bubble. The fish, however, was there; and wasting no time in vain surmise, Mishi bolted it, head and tail. It was hardly a full meal for a beast of his inches, but it was

enough to put him in a better humour with his fate. He followed on up the shore for perhaps a quarter of a mile, half expecting to find another fish. Then, coming to a spot where the stream threaded, with musical clamour, through a line of boulders which afforded him a bridge, he crossed and crept again into the woods.

Almost immediately he came upon a well-beaten trail—a path which, as his nose promptly informed him, had been made by the feet of man. Mishi's heart rose at the sight. Men, to him, meant friends and food and caresses and, above all, Merivale. With high hopes he trotted on up the path till he emerged from the woods upon the edge of a wide, sunny clearing.

Near the centre of the clearing stood a log cabin flanked by a barn and a long, low shed. At one end of the cabin a clump of tall sunflowers flamed golden in the radiant air. From the cabin chimney smoke was rising, and a most hospitable smell of pork and beans greeted Mishi's nostrils. He bounded forward joyously, thinking all his troubles at an end.

But at this very instant a big red rooster, scratching beside the barn, caught sight of the strange, tawny shape emerging from the woods. "Kree-ee-ee!" he shrilled at the top of his piercing voice, and "Kwit-kwit-kwit-ere-ee-ee!" his signal of most urgent warning and alarm. With

squawks of fright, all his hens scurried to cover—though the rooster himself, consumed with curiosity, valiantly stood his ground. A black-and-white cur popped round the corner of the barn, stared for a couple of seconds as if unable to believe his eyes, then raced, “kiyi-ing” with horror, towards the cabin door, his tail between his legs.

This was by no means the kind of welcome which Mishi had been expecting, and he paused for a moment, bewildered and rebuffed.

Fortunately for him, he was still at some distance from the cabin when the small window beside the door was thrown open and the stout woman appeared at it with her husband’s shotgun. She lifted the butt of the gun to her shoulder as she had seen her husband do, and pulled the trigger.

By some miracle—for the stout woman had made little attempt to aim—a couple of flying pellets grazed one of Mishi’s forepaws as it waved conciliatorily in the air. At the crashing report, the clatter, the shriek, and the burning sting of the wound in his paw, Mishi bounced to his feet and went bounding away into the kindly shelter of the forest, his heart bursting with injury.

The sting in Mishi’s wounded foot, as well as in his wounded feelings, now kept him going, not fast but steadily, till he had put many miles between himself and the scene of his rebuff. He

crossed several rippling amber streams overhung with golden birches and the waxy vermilion clusters of rowan berries. Not till just before sunset did he think about hunting again, and settle down to a stealthy prowl; and in the meantime sharp eyes, wary and hostile or shy and horrified, all unknown to him had marked his progress. Fox and weasel, mink and woodchuck and tuft-eared lynx, all had seen him, and recognized a new and terrible master in the wilderness; and even the indifferent porcupine, secure in his armor of deadly quills, had paused in his gnawing at the hemlock bark and quivered with apprehension as the tawny shape went by. Some ancient instinct warned him that there was a foe who might be clever enough to undo him.

Suddenly Mishi's attention was caught by a noise which curiously excited him, though he knew not why. It was a confused sound of tramlings and stampings and snortings, with now and then a flat clatter as of sticks beaten against each other. With a strange thrill in his nerves he crept forwards, and presently found himself staring out, through fringing bushes, upon a duel between two red bucks in the centre of a little forest glade.

For perhaps a minute Mishi watched the fight with a wondering interest. Then his hunger overcame all other emotions. With a mighty leap he

landed upon the shoulder of the nearest buck, bearing him to the ground. At the same time, taught by generations of deer-killing ancestors, he clutched the victim's head with one great paw and twisted it back so violently as to dislocate the neck. With eyes bulging from their heads in horror, the remaining buck and the does crashed off through the woods, leaving the dreadful stranger to his meal.

For several days Mishi remained near his kill, which he had instinctively dragged into a hiding-place behind a fallen tree. He feasted his fill, slept a good deal, explored the neighbourhood of his lair, and began to feel more or less at ease in his new surroundings. Natural instincts rapidly sprang to life in him as he sniffed at strange trails, and he came to realize that the apparently empty forest was full of good hunting if only he should go about the right way to find it. At last, growing tired of the remains of the buck, and the homesickness for his master being again strong upon him, he set forth once more on his quest, working steadily southwards and westwards, and hunting, with daily increasing skill as he went.

It was not until one night well on in October that Mishi made the acquaintance of the real monarch of the northern wilds, the great bull moose. The moon was at the full, a great, honey-coloured globe hanging low over the black, jagged line of

the farther shore and flooding the unruffled surface of the lake with a long wash of glassy radiance. About a hundred yards ahead a tall beast, looking to Mishi's eyes like an enormous deer with overgrown head and shoulders, came suddenly forth from the woods, strode slowly down the wide beach, and stood close to the water's edge, black against the moon. Stretching out her heavy muzzle over the water, she gave utterance to a strange call—long, hoarse, sonorous—which went echoing uncouthly over the solitude. She repeated the call several times, and then stood motionless, as if waiting for an answer.

The tall beast did not look to Mishi like easy game, by any means; but being both hungry and self-confident, he crept forwards, seeking a closer inspection before making up his mind whether or not to risk the attack. Suddenly a dry twig snapped close behind him. He wheeled like a flash, saw a monstrous black wide-antlered form towering above him—and leaped aside like a loosed spring, just as a huge knife-edged hoof came smashing down upon the spot where he had stood. That stroke would have shattered his backbone like an eggshell.

The blow was followed by an instant, crashing charge, resistless as an avalanche. But Mishi had not waited for it. He was up a tree in one desperate bound. Badly shaken, he crouched upon

a branch at a safe height, spitting and growling harshly, the hair on his long, lashing tail standing out like a bottle-brush. For perhaps five minutes the giant bull raged below; then again from the edge of the shining water came that long call, hoarse but desirous. The furious bull forgot his rage; the stiff mane standing up along his neck relaxed; and he went crashing off through the undergrowth, ardent to respond to that alluring summons.

About a week later—and Mishi had travelled far since his interview with the moose—on a golden afternoon of Indian summer, he came out upon a rough country road, rutted with wheelmarks and pitted with the prints of horses' hoofs. He ached for companionship. He wanted to be made much of. He lay down at full length in the middle of the road, and sniffed at the tracks, and dreamed.

A sound of light footfalls, accompanied by a tiny rattling noise, aroused him. Two children—a long-legged, sandy-haired little girl in a short red frock, white apron and pink sunbonnet, and a stumpy little boy in blue-grey homespun and an old yellow straw hat—came loitering down the road, swinging a tin dinner-pail between them. Mishi was overjoyed. His dreaming had come true. That little girl looked very like his chief playmate on the ranch. He bounced to his feet

and ran to meet them, prancing like a gigantic kitten in his delight.

At this appalling apparition the two children dropped the dinner-pail with a loud clatter, stood for one second with eyes starting from their heads, then turned and fled for their lives.

To Mishi the children's flight was all in the game. On the ranch he had been accustomed to chase the children, till they grew tired of running away, when they would turn and chase *him*, after which he would throw himself down on his back and they would all fall over him. He had been severely taught by Merivale never to be rough in his play. Now he overtook the children, brushed past them, and careered on ahead. The little boy stumbled and fell down, his knees giving way beneath him in his terror, as in a nightmare. The little girl stopped short with a dry sob of anguish, and stood over him, confronting, as she thought, instant death. She shook her apron at Mishi and cried tremulously: "Go way! Scat!"

To her amazement the great tawny beast, instead of pouncing upon her, at the sound of her voice immediately sat up like a pussy-cat and began to purr—a mighty sound, but even to her horrified ears, an unmistakable purr. She stared with all her eyes. Again she cried "Scat"—but with a little more confidence. It was an unfamiliar word to Mishi, and he could not make out what

was expected of him. In his uncertainty he played his trump card. He lay down in the road and began to roll, with all four great furry paws waving childishly in the air.

The long-legged little girl was not only heroic at heart; she was also clear-headed and of a quick understanding. She dragged her brother to his feet.

“Why, Freddy, see!” she exclaimed, steadying her voice. “He ain’t goin’ to hurt us. He *likes* us. He wants us to play with him.” She suddenly recalled the story of Androcles and the lion, which she had read in one of her schoolbooks. “Don’t you remember that man in the story, that the big lion loved so?”

Terror slipped away from her.

“Puss! Puss!” she cried. “Nice Pussy!” And she stretched out her free hand, while with the other she thrust Freddy a little behind her. Even to Freddy the great beast began to look less formidable. He stopped crying, to stare with wondering interest. As soon as Mishi got near enough, the little girl, with inward trepidation but outward firmness, patted him on the head, and as if by a flash of insight, pulled his ears, gently but authoritatively.

In an ecstasy, Mishi rubbed his head against her scratched and sunburned legs, purring louder than ever. He felt that all his woes were at an

end and that without doubt the children would lead him home to Merivale. The little boy, in violent revulsion from his terrors, began to laugh wildly, and flung his arms round Mishi's neck, rubbing his face into the warm, tawny fur.

"P'haps we kin coax him home with us, an' keep him," suggested Freddy.

The little girl pursed up her mouth doubtfully. "Wish to goodness we could," she answered, embracing the happy Mishi with ardour. "But you know we dassent. Mother would raise an awful row!"

But on this point she had no choice. Mishi absolutely refused to leave them. He stuck to them like a burr, rubbing himself lovingly against them and from time to time eying them with anxious appeal. He was desperately afraid they might vanish and leave him again to his hateful solitude.

The little grey backwoods farmhouse, with its wide farm-yard inclosed by two big barns and a long woodshed, looked very comforting to Mishi as it lay basking in the afternoon sunshine. He felt that he had come home. The kitchen door was flung open, and a woman appeared—a gaunt, lean-featured woman, soured by household cares. At the sight of Mishi her sallow face went white, and her mouth opened for a shriek. But seeing that the children were evidently on the best of

terms with the formidable-looking beast, her terror gave way to shrill wrath. She hated household pets of every kind, though the children, like their father, were somewhat recklessly addicted to them.

“What d’you mean,” she demanded, “bringing a great big dirty brute like that home with you, to mess up the house and jest make more work for me? Jest like yer father! No more consideration!”

But Mishi already had his head inside the kitchen door, sniffing at the savory smells.

“*Git out*, you brute!” screamed Mrs. Atkinson, retreating behind the door and making a pass at the purring intruder with her broom.

The children dragged the happy and unresisting animal away from the door. “All right, Mother. We’ll tie him up in the cow-shed till Daddy comes home. Don’t be frightened.”

They got a piece of clothesline, of which there is apt to be plenty on a backwoods farm, and they tied up the puzzled Mishi—as they thought securely—in a corner of the warm, shadowy barn, with plenty of sweet-smelling hay to lie on. Then, having fondled him, and tried to assure him that they would be back “right away” with food, they ran off, leaving the barn door open lest he should feel lonely.

For a minute or two Mishi lay quite still, lis-

tening to the rustle of mice in the hay, and watching the long bright streak of dusty sunlight that came through the cracks in the warped board of the barn. Presently he heard the sound of wheels, of trotting hoofs. He pricked up his ears eagerly. How often, on the ranch, had such sounds meant the return of Merivale from a trip to the station! He heard the wagon stop—his ears told him exactly where—outside the other barn. He heard a man jump out. He heard the hollow noises of horse and wagon being led in onto the barn floor. A few moments later a man came into view, striding towards the kitchen door—a tall man, like Merivale, wearing an old brown slouch hat much like Merivale's, and carrying a gun and a brace of partridges. Mishi wrenched his head from its too-loose collar of rope, and went bounding hopefully forth to greet the new arrival.

At sight of the huge tawny beast leaping towards him so swiftly, an anguish of hideous question flashed through the man's mind in the fraction of a second, and turned his blood to ice. Where were the children? Where was his wife? Why was the house so deathly quiet? He whipped the gun to his shoulder. The great beast was within a dozen feet of him. But even as his finger pressed the trigger, the little girl, with a wild scream of, "*Don't, Daddy, it's our good lion,*" sprang upon his arm from behind—and the

charge, flying wild, buried itself harmlessly in the side of the barn.

In the next instant, even as he clubbed his gun to meet the expected assault, he was astounded to see his supposed adversary rolling coaxingly at his feet, uttering sounds which were an unmistakable purr. His tense grip on the gun relaxed; and his amazement hitched itself up a few more holes as he saw the children fling themselves joyously upon the monster, pulling its ears and fondling its formidable jaws—while the monster, obviously delighted with their attentions, purred louder and louder.

Jim Atkinson stepped back and scratched his chin thoughtfully as understanding dawned upon him. That very day, at the post office in Bird's Corners, he had read a placard signed by one Merivale, offering a reward of three hundred dollars for the capture, alive and unharmed, of his escaped puma. The placard went on to say that the animal was harmless and affectionate, and answered to the name of Mishi.

"I'll be damned if 'tain't the very one," he muttered. "An' if it hadn't been for Sadie bein' that quick, I'd have shot him!" This was an unpleasant thought, and he dismissed it.

"Mishi," said he authoritatively, "come here!" And the monster, gently disengaging himself from the children, came fawning to his knees, overjoyed

to be called by the familiar name again. Taking him lightly by the scruff of the neck, Atkinson led him towards the kitchen door, where his wife stood noncommittally eyeing the scene.

“Mother,” said he, “this here’s a tame mountain lion, what the man that owns him sets great store by. I’ve just seen a notice at the post office, offering three hundred dollars’ reward fer gettin’ him back.”

“Yes, Jim A’kinson, an’ you come nigh shootin’ the poor beast, if it hadn’t ‘a’ been for Sadie.” And Mrs. Atkinson sniffed as if to imply that men had no sense at all. Before her husband could think of any suitable retort, Sadie headed off the argument by crying joyously: “Then we can keep him here, can’t we, Daddy?”

“Sure an’ sartain,” answered Atkinson, “till this here Mr. Merivale comes fer him. An’ we’ll take right good keer o’ him, too. Gosh, Mother, but that three hundred dollars is goin’ to come in handy, with the mortgage money due nex’ month, and you wantin’ a new coat.”

Her objection to having animals in her spotless kitchen quite forgotten, Mrs. Atkinson led the way indoors, and herself offered Mishi a tin plateful of buttered pancakes. Mishi devoured them politely, though he would have preferred a chicken. Then, seating himself on his haunches before the kitchen fire, he began to wash his face

with his paw like a gigantic tabby. At last he had escaped from the great loneliness. He had come home. And he felt certain that Merivale himself would presently come in by the kitchen door, and stroke his neck and pull his ears with loving roughness as of old.

WILD ADOPTION

IT HAD been a wet spring, cold and belated, and the turbulent Wassis was still in flood, raging between its scarred banks. A couple of hundred yards lower down, it plunged over the forty-foot drop of Great Falls and went crashing, torn to flying snow, through the black and narrow deeps of the gorge. The steady, trampling thunder of its plunge throbbed on the air.

Near the edge of the high bank, but not too near, stood a lanky, long-legged, long-headed moose calf, sniffing at the green and brown leaf-buds of a poplar sapling. Its preposterously long nose was pleased with the scent of the bursting leaf-buds; but the awkward youngster had not yet learned to browse, even upon such delicate fare as poplar-buds. He was still dependent on the abundant milk of his great, dark-coated mother.

The cow moose was at the other side of the glade, forty or fifty paces back from the bank, browsing comfortably on the tender, sappy twigs of a young silver birch. She was a splendid specimen of her race, full five feet high at the tip of her massive, humped shoulders; her brown, furred hide was almost black except along the belly,

where it faded to a ruddy fawn, and on the lower parts of the legs, where it was of a pepper-and-salt grey. For all her strength and her imposing appearance, however, she could lay small claim to beauty or grace; her hindquarters were much too small and meagre to balance her grand shoulders, and her huge head, with its long, overhanging muzzle and immense, donkey-like ears, would have been grotesque had it not looked so formidable.

Presently, turning her head to glance at her offspring, she decided that he was rather closer to the edge of the bluff than prudence would dictate. "M'wha!" she grunted, softly but emphatically. The calf wheeled in answer to the summons. But he did not instantly obey—for, indeed, the call had not been urgent. It had not been the usual danger signal. *That* cry would have brought him to her side at once. Now, however, he was inclined to be playful, and to tease his anxious mother. He shook his head, and executed an ungainly gambol on his absurdly babyish stilts of legs.

In that same instant, the slight extra impulse of his kick being just what was needed to precipitate the catastrophe, the whole brow of the bluff crumbled beneath him, undermined by the torrent. With an agonized bleat of terror, amid a sinking chaos of turf and stones and bushes, he vanished.

In a few gigantic strides the black mother reached the spot, with such a rush that she could barely check herself at the brink of the raw red steep. The bank at this point was fully thirty feet high, and practically perpendicular. Bawling piteously, her eyes almost starting from her head, she searched the flood. At first she could see nothing but the bushes and saplings as they swept along in the torrent. Then she caught glimpses of a small, dark form appearing and disappearing among them, feebly kicking, rolled over and over by the conflict of the tortured surges. A few moments more, and calf and wreckage together, with a sickening lunge, went over the abyss.

Crashing through the bushes, and bleating harshly as she went, the frantic mother raced along the bank till she reached a spot just over the falls. Here she paused, and stood staring down into the thunder and the tumult.

For a long time the moose cow stood there motionless and silent, her dark, uncouth form sharply outlined against the pallid sky. At last she roused herself, and moved off slowly among the pointed ranks of the fir-trees. In addition to the pain of her loss, she was tormented by the ache of her udder yearning insistently for the warm mouth which it had nursed.

Too restless to feed, she pushed her way far

back from the gorge, far back from the hated thunder of the falls, and then wandered aimlessly down the wide valley, moving without a sound through the balsam-scented silence. For all her bulk and the spread of her great, cleft, knife-edged hoofs, she could go through the woods and the undergrowth, when she chose, as noiselessly as a weasel or a fox.

Ordinarily it was the habit of the big cow moose to keep strictly to her own range, a section of the valley about four miles in length and stretching back to the hardwood ridge, some three miles from the river. This was her home, and she knew every inch of it. Now, however, it had grown distasteful to her. Continuing on downstream, a mile below the gorge, she found herself in fresh territory. Crossing a sparsely wooded rise, from which the lumbermen had cleaned out all the heavier timber, she saw below her a valley more spacious than her own, with a stretch of pale green water-meadow, or "intervale," where the wild Wassis joined its current to the broader flood of the Ottanoonsis. In the angle of their junction stood a log cabin and a barn, surrounded by several patches of roughly fenced clearing.

The scene as a whole had no interest for the unhappy mother moose, except for one item in it. In a little grassy inclosure behind the barn, hidden from the cabin windows, was a red calf, stand-

ing with its long legs rather wide apart in a posture of insecure and sprawling babyhood.

The loneliness, the helplessness, in the youngling's attitude went straight to the heart of the sorrowful mother. Involuntarily she gave a low, soft call, a call for which there is no name as yet in the vocabulary of either the naturalist or the woodsman. It was neither the mooing of a cow nor the bleating of a ewe, but it held something of both; and it was unmistakably a mother's cry. Faint and far off though it was, the lonely calf heard it, and lifted up his head hopefully.

The great black moose surveyed all the surroundings of that little inclosure with wary eyes, though the longing in her heart and the ache of her burdened udder strove to dull her caution. There was not a man-creature in sight. Satisfied on this point, she moved swiftly, but always noiselessly, down the slope, through the aisles of the fir woods, and halted behind a screen of bushes close to the fence. The red calf was gazing all about him, hoping to hear again that mother call. His colour, his form, his moist, blunt, naked muzzle were all very strange to the silent watcher; but her heart went out to him. Suddenly growing impatient—for he was hungry as well as lonely—he stretched his neck and uttered an appealing, babyish bawl.

To the moose this cry was irresistible. She

emerged at once from her hiding, breasted down the rail fence with a crash, and over its ruins strode into the inclosure.

The calf was too young and unsophisticated to be afraid. He was startled, to be sure, by the great black form approaching him so swiftly, but there was no misunderstanding the sounds—hoarse but tender—proceeding from its shaggy throat. It was the same voice, which, heard from far off, had so aroused his hopes. Somewhat doubtfully he allowed himself to be muzzled by the tall, velvet-nosed stranger; but when, with a gesture quite unmistakable, she turned her flank to him coaxingly, his hesitation vanished on the instant, and he greedily began to nurse.

Comforted, but ever vigilant, the moose stood for some minutes, alternately eying her new baby and scanning the barn and the clearing. Then, uneasy in that perilous neighbourhood, she firmly withdrew herself from the calf's eager attentions and moved off towards the gap in the fence, muttering a gentle summons for the youngster to follow. And follow he did, at once, ambling close at her side, desperately afraid lest he should lose her. Presently the curiously assorted pair vanished into the dark green mazes of the fir woods.

It chanced that the owner of the little farm at the mouth of the Wassis was a newcomer to the backwoods. Not an experienced woodsman, not

an adept in the wisdom of the wilderness, he was quite at a loss when he found that the calf had disappeared. His efforts to trail the fugitive were a failure, and he came to the conclusion that a hungry bear had broken in and carried off the tender prize. Thereafter he hunted bears with implacable hostility, though with very scant success, and those wary beasts soon came to know far more about him than he was ever able to learn about them. They sensed his enmity, and kept him under unsuspected observation.

The cow moose, travelling slowly to allow for the weakness of her adopted young, worked her way far past her old range and took up a new one at a safer distance from the clearing. Suspecting that the man-creature might come searching for the calf, she forsook the valley of the Wassis altogether, crossed the ridge, and established herself in a region of small, shallow lakes and wooded knolls drained by one of its wildest tributaries, Burnt Brook. It was a region undisturbed by the lumbermen, because the timber was small and hard to get out, and it lay somewhat aside from the trails of hunter and fisherman.

In this invigorating environment, with abundant food, and exercise exactly fitted to his needs, the red calf thrived amazingly. At first it seemed to him that he and his tall new mother were the only dwellers in the wilderness; for his strange

colour and stranger scent caused all the shy, furtive creatures to avoid him. But soon they realized that he was as harmless as any ordinary moose calf. Then he saw, all at once, that the solitude was in reality full of life. The tawny deer-mice, intent on their foraging or their play, scurried freely all about him, only taking care to avoid his clumsy hoofs. The weasels glided up and snarled at him insolently with their narrow, blood-thirsty muzzles in the air. The big, bulging-eyed snowshoe rabbits gamboled about him, glad of the protection afforded them by the presence of his mighty foster mother. And once in a while a crafty red fox, prowling past in search of a quarry, would halt and sit up on his ruddy brush of a tail to stare at him in wonder and interrogation, amazed that a moose cow should give birth to so curious a calf. The calf, full of childish pugnacity, would invariably run and butt at the bushy-tailed stranger. And that superior and self-assured animal, recognizing his childishness, would slip away with an indulgent sniff.

After the cold, late spring, summer came upon the wilderness world with a rush, and all the browns and rosy greys and ochre yellows and dusk purples were submerged in floods of ardent green. As the heat grew and the flies became troublesome, the calf learned from his foster mother the trick of wading out into the lake till only his head

was above water. Then, plunging his head under to secure a mouthful of water-lily root, which the mother taught him to relish, he would drown his winged tormentors by the myriad.

To join them in this cool retreat one day came two big black moose bulls. At this season their new antlers—the old ones having been shed early in the preceding winter—had not yet begun to sprout, and so they looked very much like the cow, except for their greater bulk and height. At this time of year they had no thought of mating, and so there was no jealous rivalry between them; their attitude towards the comely cow was one of good-natured indifference. But the red calf, which seemed to belong to her, excited their keenest curiosity. They stood and eyed him intently for some moments, while he returned the formidable stare quite unabashed. Presently they strode up close to him, one on each side, and sniffed him over, with loud snortings, and harsh mumblings in their throats. Not quite liking these attentions, the red calf drew back a step or two. Apparently there was some disapproval in their mumblings; for suddenly the cow, with an angry grunt, ran at them, and shouldered the nearest bull aside without ceremony.

The two bulls, respecting the sacred rights of a mother, promptly gave way, and wandered off lazily down to the water to pull lily-roots. If a cow

of their species was unfortunate enough to give birth to such a ridiculous and unmooselike offspring, well, it was her own affair and they were not disposed to worry about it. Thereafter, when any of the bulls of her kind were about, the cow always made haste to show that the red calf was hers, in order to avoid any possible unpleasantness. She was, indeed, as often happens, more devoted to this strange foster-child of hers than she had ever been to her own offspring. She never quite understood his moods or his manners, and this kept her interest keen.

It was not till late autumn, indeed, that the red calf realized it was possible for his dark mother to have any interest in life except himself. When his green world had turned to a riot of purple and russet and pale gold and flaming scarlet, and the wax-vermilion of the mountain-ash berries hung in lavish clusters over the white granite rocks, and thin frosts laced and powdered the glades at sunrise with sparkling silver and opal, he found his mother growing restless and sometimes forgetful of his presence. By this time the moose bulls, whom he occasionally caught sight of as they strode through the underbrush, had grown their mighty palmated antlers, and become so magnificent as to impress even his audacious and irreverent young spirit. He experienced his first sense of awe when he heard them bellowing their hoarse

challenges across the night and thrashing the bushes fiercely with their antlers.

One still, crisp night in October, when the lakes lay glassy silver and steel beneath a low primrose-coloured moon, the tall cow wandered down the beach, stretched her head out over the water and gave voice to a long, sonorous call which was unlike anything the calf had ever before heard her utter. It was answered almost at once by a harshly eager voice from the black woods around the outlet. Puzzled and anxious, the calf trotted down and nosed at his mother to attract her attention. To his surprise she brushed him aside with a sweep of her great head, impatiently. Much offended, he drew away. There was something in the air which he did not understand, and so he too stood waiting, like his mother.

Some minutes later the thick bushes on the bank above parted noiselessly, and a trim young bull, with slender antlers only in the third year, stepped down the beach. The cow turned her head to greet him with a guttural murmur of welcome. Before responding, however, the newcomer, with a threatening squeal, lowered his antlers, and chased the indignant calf away some fifty yards up the beach. Then he strode back proudly to the waiting cow, and the two began to make friends, sniffing at and caressing each other with their long, sensitive muzzles.

These pleasant preliminaries of courtship, however, were rudely interrupted. From back in the thickets came a mighty challenging roar, followed by a heavy crashing. The young bull wheeled about and roared furiously in reply, prepared to fight for his new mate. But when, a moment later, a gigantic black head, with antlers as wide again as his own, appeared above the bushes, the young bull's heart misgave him. The new arrival came smashing down upon the beach, roaring and snorting, magnificent in his prime. Whereupon the unfortunate youngster, knowing himself hopelessly overmatched, turned tail and made off at his best speed, to hide his discomfiture in the fir woods, while the faithless cow welcomed the newcomer with enthusiasm.

A few hours later, when the pair withdrew among the trees to lie down and sleep, the lonely calf, venturing to approach his mother again, was received with quite the old affection. The great bull, perceiving this, and being too experienced to be jealous of such an infant, showed no objection to his company. In the chill grey of dawn they all rose to their feet and fell to browsing together till the sunrise broke in gold and fiery rose over the misty lake.

After two or three rebuffs the calf learned to keep his distance at times, but for the greater part of the time he had no reason to resent the

stranger's presence. A day or two later, moreover, he found that the great bull, though so scornfully indifferent to him, was not indifferent to his duties as temporary father-by-adoption. It was towards midnight, and the cow and bull were down by the water in the flooding moonlight, while the calf, driven away and for the time forgotten, stood dejected behind a clump of osiers some fifty or sixty yards along the beach. A hungry bear, seizing the opportunity, launched himself down the bank and rushed upon the desolate figure, expecting an easy prey. Just in time to evade that fatal rush the calf saw the danger. Bawling shrilly with terror he dashed down the beach, the bear in hot pursuit and swiftly overhauling him.

But the calf's wild appeal did not fall on deaf ears. The stiff black manes lifting along their necks with wrath, both the bull and the cow came charging up the beach to his rescue. The bear, rounding the osier thicket, was just gathering himself for the final spring, when he caught sight of the rescuers. He was a big bear, old and of ugly temper, and the cow alone he would not have hesitated to tackle. But when he saw the stature of the great bull he was seized with sudden discretion. He stopped short, hesitated for a second, and then withdrew, grumbling but dignified, behind the osiers. The cow halted beside the

calf, to nuzzle him and inquire if he was hurt. But the bull, beside himself with rage, charged on and came crashing straight through the osiers. Whereupon the bear, appalled at his fury, threw dignity to the winds and fled at full gallop, like a frightened cat, leaving the triumphant bull to thrash the bushes and roar his defiance.

The great bull stayed with the red calf and his mother for five or six days, and then wandered off in search of other mates. But these, as it appeared, failed to hold his fancy; for towards the end of November, after the first heavy snowfall, he returned, and took charge of the family for the winter. Moving back from the lake to a sheltered and thick-wooded valley where such forage as moose love—especially birch and poplar and maple—was abundant, he established their winter quarters. There they trampled down deep paths in the ever-increasing snow, and lay snugly housed from storm beneath the dense branches of an overhanging hemlock. The calf, fortunately for himself, had learned from his mother to browse on twigs and not to depend on grass for his nourishment, and so he got through the winter without starving.

The intense cold was a searching trial to the calf, but by sleeping huddled between his mother and the bull—who had lost his antlers soon after Christmas—he managed to keep from freezing,

while his red coat grew so long and shaggy that his late owner, back at the clearing on the Ottanooosis, would never have recognized him. The return of spring found him emaciated but vigorous, and with a fierce appetite for the long, brown, withered grass of open swales and for the succulent roots of the sweet-flag and bulrush along the edges of the lake. He was heartily sick of birch-twigs. When the trees began to film with green beneath the sun and showers of May, the big bull wandered off; and the Red Calf and his mother (she had failed through some mischance, to produce a new calf that season) found themselves once more alone together beside their lonely lake.

The summer passed rather uneventfully, and by autumn Red Calf was a sturdy and agile young bull, armed with a pair of horns which were short but exceedingly sharp. Pugnacious of disposition, but with no foe to vent his pugnacity upon, he was forever butting at dead stumps and testing those new horns of his by goring and tossing the tangled bush. His mother, still devoted as ever, would watch with mild amazement these exuberant antics, so unlike what those of her own calf would have been.

When the mating moon of October began again to stir new fire in the cow's veins, Red Calf got his first chance to put his untried prowess to the test. One evening just after moonrise, before the

restless cow had begun to call, a young moose bull came striding down the beach to her side. He was very young, and the cow regarded him dubiously. Glancing past her, he caught sight of Red Calf, a stocky figure, much shorter but much heavier than himself. Aflame with jealousy, but at the same time rather contemptuous of such an unantlered rival, he lowered his own slim antlers, and charged. Red Calf, with a wrathful grunt, flung up his tail stiffly and lunged forwards to meet this unprovoked attack. With a heavy thud the two armed heads crashed together. The result was disastrous to the challenger; for instead of receiving the shock, as he expected, upon his tough, elastic antlers, he got it full upon his forehead, his brow-spikes being too wide-set to engage his opponent's stumpy horns. Half stunned, he was borne backwards, almost to his haunches. Pressing the advantage, Red Calf flung him aside, staggering, and prodded him savagely in the flank before he could recover his balance. Utterly daunted by this method of fighting—which was not according to his rules—the young bull tore himself free and fled in panic, with an ugly scarlet gash in his sleek hide. The victor chased him as far as the bushes, and then, swelling with triumph, returned to his mother for applause. To his amazement, however, she seemed very far from pleased at his achievement.

Her mane on end, she ran at him with a vicious squeal. Much offended, he retired up the bank, and lay down sulkily among the willows.

Some hours later, in response to the cow's repeated calls, another wooer appeared. But this time it was the same gigantic bull who had spent the winter with them. He was more lordly and more superbly antlered than ever; and *his* authority Red Calf never dreamed of questioning. The great bull, for his part, did not regard the youngster as a rival, and showed him no hostility. The mother, delighted to have her old magnificent mate back, forgot her fit of ill-temper. And the reunited group, harmonious and contented, hung together through the ensuing winter.

In April, as soon as the snow was gone from the open spaces, the great bull went away. For several weeks more the cow and her foster son roamed and pastured together as of old, in affectionate intimacy. And then, when the woods once more were greening in the May sunshine, the cow's mood changed. She grew impatient of her sturdy young companion's presence, and was continually trying to slip away from him. Much puzzled, he so far humoured her as to keep his distance, but he took care never to let her actually out of his sight.

Red Calf was now no longer a calf in any sense. He was a particularly fine and powerful

two-year-old bull. Expert in forest lore as any moose, he was nevertheless an alien to the wilderness, driven by needs and instincts which he could not understand. The wilderness had no companionship to offer him save that of his foster mother, and this seemed now to be failing him. He was unhappy. Vague, ancestral half-memories haunted and eluded him. The life of the wilds, the only life he could conceive of, grew distasteful to him. Though he could not be aware of it, the wilderness was, indeed, his foe, hostile at heart to him because his race for ten thousand generations had belonged to Man and been stamped with Man's impress. It was even now beginning to show its enmity. In the end it would have crushed him, but only, perhaps, after years of bitter, unmated solitude, and savage hates and the torment of vain cravings. But the Unseen Powers relented, and offered him a noble exit from the ill-suited stage.

And this was the manner of it. There came a day when the moose cow, about to become a mother again, took refuge determinedly in the heart of a dense and dark clump of young fir trees. Red Bull knew exactly where she was, and having got it into his head at last that she wanted to be alone, he reluctantly endured her absence from his sight. There in her hiding-place she gave birth to two dark brown

moose calves, long-legged, long-headed and ungainly like herself. While she was licking them and murmuring soft mother sounds to them, a huge black bear, still gaunt and hungry from his winter hardships, came prowling past the thicket. He heard those mother sounds and understood them. Pausing for a second or two to locate them accurately, he crept up close to the fringing branches, gathered his mighty muscles for the spring, and crashed in, counting on instant kill. But a massive drooping bough which he had not marked in the gloom, diverted slightly that deadly rush, and the blow of his pile-driving paw, which should have broken the mother's back, merely slashed her lean rump as she wheeled nimbly to face the attack and fell on the uplifted head of one of the calves, crushing out its hardly started life.

In the next fraction of a moment there was another crash, and Red Bull, with a grunt of rage, came charging into the battle. His armed front struck the bear full in the ribs, jarring the breath from his lungs with a gasping cough, and almost bowling him over.

But Red Bull did not understand his dreadful adversary's method of fighting. Instead of springing back, and fencing for a chance to repeat that mighty buffet, he kept at close quarters, pushing and goring in blind fury. The bear, twisting about, caught him a sweeping stroke on the side

of the head which raked half his face away, and then, lunging clear, brought down the other huge forepaw on the back of his neck. It was as irresistible, that blow, as the fall of a boulder. Red Bull sank upon his knees and slowly rolled over, the vertebræ of his neck not only dislocated but smashed to splinters.

But his sharp horns had done their work, piercing to the bear's vitals and ripping his ribs open. The desperate mother, meanwhile, had been slashing his haunches to ribbons with mad blows of her knife-edged hoofs. The bear was in a bad way. Whining and choking, he dragged himself off, making all haste to escape the punishment of those pounding and rending hoofs. The frantic cow followed him clear of the thicket, and then rushed back to the remaining calf. Quivering with anxiety, she stood over it, licking it and nosing it to assure herself it was unhurt. And in her mother solicitude she had not even a glance to spare for the mangled body of her protector, who had so splendidly repaid the debt of her long adoption.

THE KING OF THE FLOES

SO MUCH to be done, so few brief weeks to do it in, that the ardent arctic summer was working overtime. The long, long months of sunless night and unimaginable cold were to be undone—the months of black and shrieking storm, of intolerable winds death-cold from the voids of space, of intolerable stillness when the ghost-lights danced low above the endless, naked ice and death of the Roof-of-the-world. The sun, in haste to console after his long forgetfulness, was circling in the sky throughout the whole twenty-four hours, never quite disappearing below the hazy pink horizon. Under the unremitting pour of his eager beams, icy pinnacles cracked and crumbled; deep fissures of ineffable sapphire opened in the ice-walls of eternal glacier, and ran with sharp reports along the tumbled fields of the floe. Here and there appeared wide patches of green and dancing water, with narrow lanes leading out to the open sea, where it chafed incessantly at its shrinking boundaries.

Shoreward, low ridges, and raw, jagged teeth of rock, black and slate-blue and rust-red, came

into view above the limitless white desolation. Along the southerly bases of the rocks, and in every sunward-facing, sheltered hollow, where the harsh soil was bare of snow and thawed and warmed to a depth of two or three inches over its foundations of impregnable frost, a film of light but vivid green was springing into hurried life, and already starred thick with tiny blooms, pink, yellow, and ethereal lavender, all in haste to fertilize and be fertilized, and to ripen their precious seeds and drop them back into the mould, ere the night of cold should again close down upon them. Amid the blooms bustled innumerable tiny flies and gleaming beetles, with here and there a flickering mite of a butterfly, paper-white or pallid mauve. Over the faces of the rocks were spreading stains and smudges of pinkish grey and dull greenish yellow, where the newborn lichens were reproducing themselves in the fecundating radiance. The still air was faintly musical with the babble of innumerable rills.

At one point, through some whim of tide and current, the ice-floe had drawn quite clear of the shore, leaving some three hundred yards of beach uncovered. It was a beach ribbed with ice-ground ridges of purple-black rock, which now, at low tide, held a miscellaneous drift of weeds and disrooted mussels and stranded crustaceans in their shallow intervening pools.

From behind a jutting shoulder of black-and-purple rock came, suddenly and silently, a long, slouching, terrifying figure, the great white bear of the arctic. His narrow, low-browed snaky head and black-tipped muzzle were stretched out straight before him and his nostrils quivered as he sniffed the clear air for the taint of anything that might ease his mighty appetite. Living prey he did not expect, at the moment, or the terror of the North would not have shown his dread shape so openly upon that naked stretch of sunlit shore. But for nearly an hour, with the patience of all great hunters, he had lain hidden and motionless among the rocks, hoping that the seals, his favourite quarry, might be tempted shoreward to bask in this sheltered cove. Balked of this hope, he wandered down the beach to see what gleanings from the harvest of the tides might be gathered in the rock-pools.

A few mussels and whelks he had already scooped up and crunched greedily; a glutinous, musky-flavoured squid he had gulped down with relish, when he came upon a prize worth his quest. It was a big rock-cod, lodged, white-belly upward, in a fissure of the ledge. He clawed it forth and turned it over exultantly. It was fresh-killed—a great mouthful bitten cleanly out of the thick of the back.

Hastily bolting the fish, this wary hunter shrank

down flat upon his belly, making himself as small and inconspicuous as possible, and scanned the sea beyond the ice with savage, hopeful eyes. He knew at once that that bite was the work of a seal, of a seal killing eagerly, this way and that, among swarming victims, without stopping to gather in the booty.

That seal and his fellows, their hunger gluttoned, might presently come out upon the floe to bask and doze in the sunshine.

Soundlessly as a cloud-shadow, and almost as unnoticeably, the bear twisted and crawled his way out to the edge of the bright floe, and flattened himself down between two hummocks. As soon as he was motionless, he seemed to melt from view, so perfectly did he match himself to his surroundings. The keenest, most suspicious eye would have had to look twice or thrice before detecting, among the greyish and yellowish blurs upon the shadowy whiteness, the outlines of that sinister form and snaky, black-snouted head. The point of blackness, instead of betraying its owner, had the effect of making his faint outlines less conspicuous and diverting the eye from them. Here he lay rigid as if frozen into the ice, hoping that one of the expected seals would emerge close before him, within reach of the lightning stroke of his armed paw. If not, then he would wait till the seals had floundered out upon the floe, inter-

cept their retreat, and probably secure at least one victim before they could get back to their refuge in the water.

The bear had lain there in tense expectancy for perhaps a dozen minutes when suddenly, just beneath his nose, the grey-green sea surged heavily. A huge, glistening, rusty black head shot upward, almost in the watcher's face; and he found himself confronted by the hideous, tusked and whiskered mask of a gigantic bull-walrus.

The two massive yellow tusks growing downward from the mighty upper jaw of the walrus were over two feet in length, straight, gleaming, and tapered to a fine point. The long, stiff whiskers standing out on each side of the muzzle were thick as porcupine quills. The small, steady eyes, set deep in the low-crowned skull, flamed into sudden rage as they found themselves staring into the fierce eyes of the bear.

For some seconds the two great beasts, thus brought so startlingly face to face, eyed each other unwaveringly without a movement on either side. The bear, in the first wrath of his disappointment, itched to slash across that grotesque and defiant mask with his rending paws. But his sagacity, well trained in the harsh struggle of arctic life, restrained him. Presently he shifted his gaze for a swift instant, and noted that the surface of the sea all about the edge of the floe was dotted with

other dark and glistening whiskered heads, most of them tusked like that of the bull before him. He knew that the tuskless heads were those of the fat young calves. The walrus herd was coming ashore. He reflected that, secure in their strength and their numbers, they might grow careless in the lazy sunshine, and then, if they thought he had gone away, one of those calves might possibly stray within his reach. In any case, he had nothing to gain but discomfiture if he should remain to try conclusions with the giant walrus—who at this moment seemed quite ready for the adventure.

With a throaty snarl the bear arose to his full height, turned his furry rump contemptuously upon his rival, and stalked off to the beach to disappear among the rocks, as if acknowledging that it was useless for him to try to hunt walrus. Immediately the bull heaved his enormous, warty carcass higher from the water, hooked his tusks over the solid edge of the floe, and with a loud grunt, drew himself forth upon the ice, where he lay sprawling complacently, to watch the foe's retreat. In five minutes or so, the whole herd, following with confidence their invincible leader, had lumbered forth upon the floe with noisy splashings and gruntings, and were basking their uncouth bulks in the genial glow.

Counting himself, and not without reason, King of the Floes, Ah-wook, the giant walrus, in the

complacency of his self-trust forgot all about the great white bear as soon as that crafty marauder had vanished from his sight. And the whole herd forgot with him. The only foe whom Ah-wook had learned to fear was man—represented by the Eskimo, with his swift kayak and deadly swift harpoon. For months there had been no sign of man in all that region. It was a fitting time, when the arctic sun burned so benignly, for the King of the Floes to relax his vigilance.

With ponderous floppings and gruntings, the herd scattered all over the ice. Their rough and oily-black hides, almost bursting with fatness, glistened in the sunlight. The unwieldy cows, tusked like the bulls and almost as ferocious-looking (but the tenderest and most devoted of mothers), sprawled happily as they nursed their ever-greedy calves. These latter, many of them almost as big as their mothers, but as yet without tusks, were as grotesquely unlovely as the offspring of such monstrous parents might be expected to be. As a rule, there is some charm or grace or winsomeness to be found in the younglings of even the clumsiest and ugliest of the wild kindreds. But the baby walrus can only be accounted a gross caricature of babyhood.

It chanced that one young cow, less wary and more adventurous than her companions, was smitten with a whim to try basking on the dry,

grey, sun-warmed ledges of the beach instead of on the ice. With her half-grown calf floundering anxiously at her side, she slipped off the floe, and with gusty snortings worked her way some twenty or thirty paces up the shore till she gained a flat ledge which was precisely to her liking. Settling herself complacently,—for never before had she experienced so warm a couch,—she turned and called to the calf, which, finding the rocks uncomfortable to travel over, had dropped a few yards behind. The fat and flabby youngster squealed protestingly, as if to say he was coming as fast as he could; and then, seized with sudden fear of the strange element upon which he found himself, he stopped, and looked back longingly at the safe water and the familiar ice.

At this moment, from behind the nearest shoulder of rock a huge white shape burst forth, launched itself, with a clatter of iron claws on ledge and gravel, across the open, and fell upon the unhappy calf. One blow of the terrific mailed paw (which looked so furry soft) smashed the youngster's neck, and it collapsed, quivering like an enormous mass of dark-brown jelly. In the same second the bear seized it by the head and with frantic haste started to drag the prize away to some safe refuge among the rocks—for well he knew the devotion and the blind fury of the walrus mother.

In spite of the great bulk of the carcass—little short of half a ton in weight—the bear handled it almost as a fox would have handled an extra-fat hare. But for all his agility and his tremendous strength, he was not quite quick enough to get away with the prize. With a bellowing scream of grief and rage, the mother hurled herself downward from her ledge, rearing and plunging over the rocks at such speed that the slaughterer was overtaken before he had gained a score of yards. With an angry growl he dropped his booty and sprang aside just in time to escape such a blow from those pile-driving tusks as would have brought his career to a gory end. Circling nimbly, as the mother came down upon her flippers at the end of her plunge and paused half covering the body of her young, he dashed in and sprang upon her back, tearing savagely with his murderous claws.

But the cow's hide was too tough, the padding of blubber beneath it too thick, for either his claws or his teeth to make much impression upon it. He tore a couple of hideous red gashes, indeed; but to the maddened cow they were mere surface wounds, of as little consequence as a bloody nose to a fighting schoolboy. She reared her monstrous shoulders again and shook off her adversary, at the same time swinging about with such lightning speed that she caught him a glancing stroke upon

the rump with one tusk as he scurried out of reach. Slight enough it seemed, that blow, but it tore away fur and hide, and from its effects the bear was to go limping for weeks thereafter.

Recognizing himself overmatched, but seeing that the cow was too engrossed with her dead to attempt the vain task of pursuing him, the bear sat down on his haunches and surveyed the situation in a cold fury, his jaws slavering red foam, his splendid white coat dishevelled and plastered with blood. What he saw was enough to daunt the stoutest heart that ever throbbed beneath a furry hide. The giant Ah-wook, grunting his wrath, was just floundering up from the lip of the floe; and on either side of him a line of bulls and cows only less monstrous than their chief, their whiskers bristling, their vengeful tusks gleaming and lunging as the dreadful array wallowed forward. With rather more haste than consisted with his dignity the bear made off, limping, and climbed to a ridge where he knew no walrus could ever follow him. There, well hidden, he lay down to lick his wound and to watch what his foes might do.

Seeing their enemy thus routed, the angry herd calmed down, and presently turned back to their basking on the floe. But Ah-wook came straight till he reached the side of the bereaved cow. To

his practised eye it was plain at once that the calf was dead, and this knowledge he somehow conveyed to the mother. But she paid no heed to him. She was determined to get her young, dead or alive, back to the kind, familiar shelter of the sea. Hooking her tusks beneath the lax bulk, she lifted and dragged it clumsily till she had got it halfway down the slope. Then it fell into a deep crevice and jammed itself there in such a way that she could get no hold or purchase upon it. Ah-wook, though he kept close to her side protectingly, made no attempt to help her. The youngster was dead, and therefore of no more consequence in his eyes. At last, in despair, the mother gave up, and made off sullenly towards the floe; and Ah-wook followed close behind her, from time to time pausing to look back and glare defiance at the lonely line of rocks.

As he watched his invincible adversaries depart, leaving his victim behind them, the bear licked his lips in satisfaction and contempt. He was going to win, after all. But he was in no hurry. He would let the stupid sea-beasts forget their anger before he would descend to reclaim the booty. He knew the walrus were great feeders. They would soon grow hungry, and would betake themselves again to the sea to grub for their coarse provender on the muddy bottom of the bay. He himself was hungry, to be sure; but his appetite had

already waited some time, and could afford to wait a little longer.

As he lay there in the sun, nursing his well-founded anticipations, and disturbed only by the ache in his wounded haunch, he caught sight of a pair of little blue arctic foxes stealthily creeping forth upon the beach. Their fine noses wrinkled and sniffed hungrily as they caught the taint of fresh blood upon the air. Presently they located the body of the dead walrus calf wedged in its crevice.

To the cunning little prowlers such a find was almost too good to be true. It aroused their suspicions. Surely there was a catch in it somewhere. They crept forward with the utmost caution, glancing about them at every noiseless step, and taking advantage of every cranny or boulder to conceal their advance.

At first glimpse of the small intruders the bear had given vent to a low growl of annoyance. The tiny beasts, of course, could make no serious impression on that vast bulk of flesh. They could do no more than gnaw away some fragments of the tough hide. But like all the hunting beasts, the bear was very jealous of his kill, and hated to have any other creature, however humble, sample the feast before he himself had had a chance to satisfy his appetite. He restrained himself, however, till the foremost of the two foxes was

within a foot or two of the body. Then suddenly he leaned forth head and shoulders from his hiding-place, and uttered a short, strident snarl of menace.

The foxes cast one look upon the dreadful, grinning mask that glared down upon them from the ridge, then scurried off respectfully. But as soon as they felt themselves safely out of sight, they halted, circled about and crept to a place of concealment in the very crest of the ridge, whence they could command a clear view of the bear's subsequent actions. They considered, not unreasonably, that there should be some substantial remnants to be picked up after his banquet.

The bear, meanwhile, was growing impatient. The pain of his wound was not improving his temper. But the walrus herd still basked complacently on the ice, in full view; and their colossal leader, keeping his post on the landward edge of the floe, appeared dangerously alert and watchful. The hungry bear felt that there was nothing to do but continue the dull game of waiting.

How much longer his prudence might have kept curb upon his appetite it would be hard to say; but now an unforeseen factor came into the problem. Though the vast northern solitudes seem so empty, they are nevertheless secretly populous, teeming with furtive life; and news of any considerable killing—which must mean food for some

one—travels mysteriously. The wandering airs make haste to carry it, and none who receives the tidings is left indifferent.

A pack of half a dozen arctic wolves, long-jawed and ravenous, emerged from a deep ravine which cleft the ridge, and trotted boldly forth upon the beach, sniffing interrogatively. Straightway they spotted the rich prize there in plain view, jammed in the crevice. And straightway, disdain- ing craft or investigation, confident in their feroc- ity and their speed, they swept down upon it at full gallop.

For the patient watcher on the ridge this was too much. With a roar of indignation he pro- jected himself down the slope like an avalanche, and reached the body of the young walrus some ten paces ahead of the wolves. Standing over it on three legs, he turned, with fangs bared and one paw uplifted, and faced the pack with a low snarl of warning.

The wolves, well knowing the power of that terrific paw, halted abruptly. The leader sat upon his haunches, with his tongue hanging out, and blinked sagaciously. The rest of the pack divided, two to one side and three to the other, and encircled their huge antagonist, their eyes glinting green, and their jaws slaver- ing. Keeping just at a safe distance of a dozen feet, or so, they uttered never a sound; and the bear, too, stopped

his snarling, and waited. He felt pretty confident that, bold though they were, they would not dare to close with him; but he was taking no risks.

And out on the floe, not fifty paces away, the walrus lifted their tusked and whiskered heads and stared with lazy curiosity. Ah-wook, indeed, went so far as to flounder to the very edge of the floe, half minded to take a hand in the affair and see those puny land-beasts scatter before his onset. He feared neither bear nor wolves. But he was so secure in his strength and in the armour of his massive hide that it hardly seemed worth his while to score so cheap a triumph. In the end his indolence conquered, and he was content to watch the drama.

It was the bear, at length, who decided to force the issue. Suddenly, like a coiled spring let loose, he hurled himself at the leader of the pack, who leaped aside like a hare, just in time to save himself. At the same instant two of the other wolves dashed in and snapped at the bear's hindquarters. The bear, however, had anticipated this very move, and his charge upon the leader had been merely a feint. Doubling back just as his rash assailants reached him, he caught one of them full on the side, ripping him open and hurling him twenty feet away. The rest of the pack, to whom nothing in the way of meat came amiss, promptly fell upon the corpse, and devoured it; and the

bear, happy to see them so well occupied, made haste to take the edge off his own hunger. Then he proceeded laboriously to drag the carcass up among the rocks, where he could conclude his meal more comfortably.

And the wolves, grown less ravenous and more discreet, followed him at a prudent distance, remembering that when he had well gorged himself, he would go away somewhere to sleep, leaving them to feast at their ease.

About this time, though the sun shone as benignantly as ever, a certain restlessness began to show itself in the basking herd of walrus. As if with one simultaneous impulse, they all began to grunt, swaying upon their flippers. Ah-wook forthwith forgot his lazy interest in the great white bear and the wolves. Whirling his gigantic bulk about, he floundered through the herd to the farther edge of the floe, and plunged, with a resounding splash, into the quiet green sea. In hot haste the whole herd followed him. For perhaps a minute the still air was loud with the heavy splashings. Then every dark form vanished, while the water heaved and creamed along the edges of the ice. The feeding-time of the walrus had arrived.

This little bay, as I have said, was comparatively shallow, and its bottom, for the most part, of rich deep mud, ribbed with flat ledges which the

tide-wash kept scoured. It was a fruitful breeding place for huge, coarse clams and mussels, and innumerable crustaceans large and small. In fact, it was swarming with shoal-water life, and hence was an ideal pasturage for the herds of the walrus. Scattered all over the teeming bottom, the hungry monsters grubbed up the mud with their tusks, or with the same efficient weapons raked the rock-loving shellfish from the ledges, rarely troubling to crush the hard morsels between their irresistible jaws, but preferring to gulp them down whole, shell and all. And if they swallowed quantities of mud and small stones at the same time, that did not trouble either their indiscriminating palates or their incomparably hardy stomachs. Above them, as they fed, the sunlight glimmered down greenly through the tranquil tide; and the silver-bellied cod and hake and pollock, singly or in shoals, darted hither and thither in confusion, while the fat and sluggish flat-fish—plaice and flounder and fluke—disturbed in their feeding on the mud, flounced up indignantly and glided off to serener pasturage.

Suddenly among the bewildered shoals of cod and pollock appeared a gleaming and terrible shape before which they all scattered like plover before a goshawk. Some sixteen or seventeen feet in length, slender and sinister, and with a keen lance about two feet long standing straight

out from its pointed nose, it came soundlessly and with appalling swiftness from out of the great deeps. It paid no attention to the panic-stricken fish. It hung poised for a second or two above the unsuspecting walrus herd, staring down upon them with round, blazing eyes as hard as glass. Then, having selected as the most manageable prey a very young calf which clung close to the mother's side as she nosed in the mud, it gave one screwlike sweep of its mighty tail, shot downward, and drove its sword clean through the youngling's tender body, cleaving its heart.

Ordinarily, the tactics of the giant swordfish would have been to bear away the victim on his sword, to be stabbed to fragments and devoured comfortably at a distance from the herd. But in this case, the fatal thrust having been delivered from above, the prize was not impaled in such a position as to be carried off conveniently. The slayer, therefore, withdrew his weapon, backed away a few yards at a lower level, and with a short but irresistible rush transfixed the prize once more, this time through the flank, in the same movement lifting it several feet clear of the bottom.

The outraged mother, bewildered for a moment, now reared herself directly in the slayer's path, frantic and dangerous. The great fish, his sword burdened and useless, was compelled to back away

and change his course. And at this instant Ah-wook, as nimble in the water as a seal, took a hand in the murderous game. His presence, close at hand, had been ignored by the overconfident swordfish, who expected no interference except from the mother of his victim. As he swerved aside, somewhat heavily by reason of the burden upon his sword, a colossal black bulk suddenly overshadowed him, and two long tusks, piercing him through the middle of the back, crushed him down irresistibly upon the bottom.

Although the great swordfish was a good four hundred pounds of corded muscle and galvanic nervous energy, he was no match for the mighty bull walrus, whose weight was over a ton and whose cunning far outclassed his own. Nevertheless his gigantic convulsions, and the paroxysmal lashings of his tremendous tail, enabled him to bear his captor along, hither and thither among the astonished herd, plowing deep furrows in the mud. But not all his frantic writhings could shake loose the grip of those inexorable tusks or lighten the crushing, suffocating pressure upon his back. And all the time Ah-wook—who nursed a special grudge against the swordfish tribe by reason of a gnarled and ancient scar along his flank—kept boring down inexorably with all his weight, and rending and grinding within the body of his adversary. The mud was churned up, and the green

tide, for fathoms all about the titanic contest, boiled to the surface, brown and frothy and blood-streaked.

Then on a sudden, his backbone wrenched apart, the swordfish ceased to struggle and lay limp.

For a few seconds more Ah-wook continued to shake him as a terrier shakes a rat, jerking the body about savagely as if to glut his vengeance to the full. Then, his labouring lungs warning him that it was time to take breath, he withdrew his tusks and shot up to the surface. Here he lay floating for a minute or two, deeply drinking in the vital air; and presently the water all about him was dotted with the staring heads of his followers. Next, floating belly upward, appeared the long, mangled body of the swordfish, the calf still firmly impaled upon its sword. Ah-wook grunted scornfully at the sight, raised himself high in the water to glare about him as if in challenge to other adversaries, and at length led the way in triumph back to the floe, confirmed in his kingship both by sea and by land.

BILL

I

THE wide river, gone shallow in the midsummer heats, ran sweetly under the starlight, babbling among its long sand-bars and chafing with a soft roar against the ragged, uncovered ledges. The steep and lofty shores, at this point some four hundred yards apart, were black with forest to their crests. From a still pool close inshore sounded sharply the splash of a leaping salmon.

Presently from behind a dark promontory about a mile downstream came a muffled, rhythmic, throbbing noise, accompanied, as it grew louder, by a heavy splashing. A few moments more and a white steamboat, her flat sides dotted with lights from the cabin windows, rounded into view. She was a stern-wheeler—in river parlance a “wheelbarrow boat”—propelled by a single huge paddle-wheel thrust out behind her stern. Flat-bottomed like a scow and of amazingly light draught, she drew so little water that the river men used to declare she would need only a heavy dew to enable her to navigate across the meadows. Driving her way doggedly upwards against the

stiff current, she puffed and grunted like some gigantic animal, and red sparks from her wood-fed furnace streamed from the top of her lean black funnel. Her captain was driving her at top speed, because the river was falling so rapidly that he feared lest he might get hung up for lack of water in the channel before reaching his destination, which was yet a good day's journey distant.

In the long, lamp-lit cabin upstairs the few rough-clad passengers were smoking and playing cards, or dozing as well as they could on the stiff chairs, while a buxom, red-haired girl heroically strummed Moody-and-Sankey hymn-tunes on an unmelodious piano. There was no sleeping accommodation; for the old *Forest Queen*, except under stress of circumstances like the present, was wont to do all her journeying by daylight. But the passengers were not grumbling. All they wanted was to arrive—not to be hung up, by the shrinking of the stream, on some sand-bar in the heart of the wilderness. They knew the anxious captain was making good time, and they were all in good temper.

All, with one exception. Down on the lower deck, in the wide space between the furnace door and the bows, among piled freight—boxes of smoked herring, kegs of molasses, cases of miscellaneous groceries, dry-goods, and hardware—

was tethered an immense, long-haired, greyish brown goat, with an imposing beard hanging from his throat and a pair of formidable horns sweeping back from his massive forehead. This dignified-looking passenger was in a very bad temper indeed. His wishes had not been consulted in regard to the journey he was making. He had been hustled on board by the lusty deck hands with cheerful and irresistible familiarity; and he had had no chance whatever to avenge himself upon any one of them. He stood glowering, with wrath in his heart and scorn in his great, yellow, supercilious eyes, at the sweating firemen and the roaring, blazing mouth of the furnace beneath the boiler. The glare and the windy roar of the red flame, the loud pulsing of the wheel, the ceaseless vibration of the straining boat, all the inexplicable strangeness of the situation into which he had been so rudely thrust, filled him with uneasiness, indeed, but had no power to shake his defiant spirit.

The captain of the *Forest Queen* was a skilled river man, his intrepidity wisely tempered with discretion. But long immunity from accident had produced the usual effect. The ancient proverb of the pitcher that goes too often to the well is apt to justify itself at last. Confident in his boat and in his skill, absorbed in his determination to beat the river, he forgot how the drought had

been drying up not only the river but the long-seasoned upper timber of the *Forest Queen*; he forgot the sparks which his over-driven furnace was vomiting from the funnel. One after another they caught, and clung, and gathered fresh vitality, and began to gnaw their way along the cracks in the parched timbers of the cabin roof. Thin, vicious red lines began to show themselves. A shift in the channel, a slight veering in the course of the boat, brought a draft along the cracks, and the furtive red lines leaped to life. Then, with startling suddenness, the whole after section of the cabin roof burst into flames.

Pandemonium broke loose. The shrill, tin-throated bell rang frantic signals. The hoarse steam whistle hooted and hooted. The one, inadequate length of fire hose—used for flushing the lower deck—was dragged aloft with shouts, and its puny stream spurting into the struggle. Brimming and splashing deck buckets were passed up the companion and emptied futilely at the mocking monster which seemed as if it had just swooped aboard out of space to overwhelm and devour its prey.

The battle was lost even before it was well begun. The old boat was as dry as a match box, and blazed riotously. The passengers in the cabin snatched up their belongings, flung themselves down the companion, and crowded forward as

far as possible from the already scorching heat. The captain, seeing his boat was doomed, headed her about and ran her up as high as he could upon a long sandspit which jutted out from the shore a couple of hundred yards below. He would at least save something of the cargo.

The passengers, with their grips and bundles, jumped from the bows to dry land, ran up the slope, and stood to watch the conflagration. The crew began feverishly tumbling the freight overboard and dragging it up the sand. The goat, who was by this time beginning to get alarmed, stamped impatiently and gave utterance to a loud bleat. One of the deck hands, crying, "We ain't goin' to forgit you, Bill, you old b——!" ran up, seized him by one horn, slipped the tether from his collar, dragged him to the side, and gave him a friendly kick on the rump to hasten his departure.

Bill sprang into the air, landed lightly on the sand, and whipped about like a flash, with lowered head, to avenge the insult to his dignity. But his rude rescuer was still on board, far out of his reach. Another of the deck hands, however, was close by, with his back to him, just stooping to lift a bale of blankets. The mark was irresistible. With a snort of indignation Bill launched himself, struck the unsuspecting man fair on the broad seat of his breeches, and sent

him sprawling headlong into a pile of boxes. The man picked himself up with a volley of remarks which would make the printer's ink blush red, and glared around for some weapon with which to punish his assailant. But Bill, his honour satisfied, was already far up the sandspit, capering derisively. At the edge of the bushes which lined the bank he turned and stared for a few moments at the soaring and roaring flames which filled the river valley with wild light, at the wide water rippling gold and scarlet past the already half consumed wreck of his late prison, at the dense brown and orange clouds of smoke billowing away slowly on the light night airs, at the confusion and turmoil on the sandspit. He had never seen anything in the least like it before. He did not understand it. And it all annoyed him extremely. With a toss of the head he bounded through the screen of bushes, and made off, prancing and leaping freakishly, into the black shadows of the woods.

II

For the moment, Bill had but one idea in his head, which was to put the scene of his discomfitures and indignations as far behind him as possible. From the burning boat there was light enough for him to see his way pretty clearly. At this point the precipitous ridge which skirted

the river was cleft by a steep, rocky, wooded valley leading up into the wild solitudes behind the ridge. A tiny thread of a stream, now gathering into still pools, now tinkling silverly over the ledges in thin films of cascades, meandered down to lose itself in the river just below the sandspit. Sure-footed and light of tread like all his tribe, and exulting in his freedom, Bill took by choice the most difficult portions of the always difficult path, leaping unerringly from rock to windfall, from ledge to slippery ledge, and balancing his great bulk of corded muscle as airily as a bird. As he ascended the way grew brighter, and the now shrinking fire once more came into view above the tree-tops behind him. Discontented at this, he hastened his flight; and soon, having traversed the saddle of the pass and lost the stream, he turned off sharply along a grassy glade, a half dried strip of swamp. A shoulder of the ridge behind him cut off all view or hint of the river valley, and he found himself swallowed up in the starlit, shadowy dark.

And now, at last, Bill began to feel the utter strangeness of his surroundings. The product of generations of civilization, he had few of the instincts of his wild ancestors left in his make-up, except for his proud independence and his impatience of restraint. He had no fear of the darkness—he had no apprehension that it might hide

unknown perils. But an unwonted sense of loneliness began to oppress him, and his ebullience of spirits died down. Moving noisily hither and thither, he cropped the wild grasses, and browsed, with interested curiosity, on the leaves and twigs of such of the bushes as appealed to his investigating nose. Having made a satisfying meal he pushed under some overhanging leafage and lay down, looking out upon the starlit glimmer of the glade, and calmly, ignorantly, turning his back upon whatever menace might lurk in the blackness of the forest.

As soon as he was quiet the vast silence seemed to grip him. He had never before been aware of such silence absolute, and it presently began to arouse within him a deep-buried ancestral instinct of vigilance. His great yellow eyes rolled watchfully from side to side, though he knew not why, as he was conscious of no dread. His nostrils opened wide, questioning the novel scents of the forest air. His ears began to turn slowly backwards and forwards, straining to catch some hint of sound that would relieve the intolerable stillness.

For a long ten minutes or so there came no such relief; for all the small, furtive life of the forest had been stilled apprehensively by the intrusion of this noisy, mysterious-looking stranger. The rule of the wild was "When in doubt don't

stir!" Then, in a little while, these creatures of short memory forgot their fears, forgot even the intruder's presence. The tiny feet of the wood-mice once more scurried faintly among the dry spruce-needles; and a chorus of tiny squeaks proclaimed a disagreement over some captured moth or beetle. Bill's ears turned approvingly towards the sound, but his unpractised vision failed to make out the authors of it. The elusive noises stopped abruptly,—and a pair of small, sharply flaming eyes, set close together and near the ground, floated swiftly into view. They met Bill's wide-eyed, interested stare with savage defiance. Behind the eyes Bill presently made out the slim, lithe, snaky form of a weasel. Sensing the venomous hostility of the malevolent little prowler, he shook his horns and gave a loud snort of contempt. The weasel slipped away into the darkness as soundlessly as it had come, in search of a hunting-ground not pre-empted by this big mysterious stranger.

Not many moments later there came a light and muffled *pitpat* of leaping feet, and Bill saw three "snow-shoe" rabbits emerge into the glade. They sat up on their hind-quarters, ears erect, and stared about in every direction with their foolish bulging eyes. Then they fell to gambolling as light-heartedly as children, chasing and leaping over each other as if quite forgetful of the fact

that life, for them, was one incessant game of dodging death. As he watched their play, Bill began to feel more at home. He had seen rabbits—tame rabbits—before, lots of them; and though he had always hitherto regarded this tribe with toplofty indifference, he now felt distinctly friendly to them. They called up pleasant memories and cheered the solitude. He even had a fleeting impulse to jump up and prance and gambol with them; but his instinct warned him that if he tried it they would take alarm and vanish. He did not want them to go, so he kept quite still.

Then a startling thing happened,—startling even to such unroutable self-possession as Bill's. From the blackness of an alder-thicket just opposite, a shadowy shape, almost as big as Bill himself, shot into the air, with a harsh sound which seemed to paralyze the little players for an instant. In that instant one of them was struck down by a broad, keen-taloned paw. Its dying scream seemed to release its two companions from their trance of terror, and they bounded off into the woods.

The slayer, a big Canada lynx, almost as long in the body as Bill himself, but much slighter in build, lifted his round, tuft-eared snarling face and stood, with one paw on his prey, glaring about him triumphantly with moon-pale, coldly savage eyes. But he crouched again instantly, laying back his tufted ears and baring his long white fangs, as

he found himself looking into the large, inscrutable eyes of Bill, who had risen to his feet, gazing at him from beneath the branches.

Besides bitterly resenting the attack upon his little friends, the rabbits, Bill instinctively, on his own account, loathed the great lynx at sight. He had always had an antipathy to cats; and this, in his eyes, was just a gigantic and particularly objectionable cat.

For the fraction of a second the lynx stood his ground, ready to battle for his prey. Then the strangeness of the apparition, and of the manner of its attack, daunted him. He shrank back and sprang aside. But his delay had been a mistake. He was not quite quick enough. Bill's iron front caught him far back on the flank,—not, indeed, with full force, but with emphasis enough to send him sprawling. With a yowl of dismay he scrambled to his feet and fled ignominiously, the hairs on his stub of a tail standing out like a bottle-brush. Bears and wolves he knew; the antlered stag and moose-bull he understood; but Bill was a phenomenon he could not account for, and had no stomach to investigate.

Quite satisfied with his swift and easy victory, Bill had no thought of trying to follow it up. He stamped two or three times with his slim forehooves, as he stared after the enemy's flight, then he turned and sniffed inquiringly at the mangled

rabbit. The smell of the fresh blood struck a kind of horror to his heart. He drew back, snorting and shaking his head. The place grew suddenly distasteful to him. Then, forgetting his dignity, he went bounding away down the glade, deeper and deeper into the forest, till the unpleasant impression faded away as his veins ran warm with the effort. At length, somewhat breathless, and weary from his crowded experiences, he snuggled down against the foot of a mossy boulder and went comfortably to sleep.

In the chill of a pink and silvery dawn he woke up, sprang to his feet, and gazed about him at the unfamiliar scene. Dew lay thick on the grass and moss and leaves. White wisps of mist coiled thinly in the narrow open glades. Down the dim corridors between the tree-trunks, it was still grey dusk; but the high tops of the light green birches and the dark green firs and hemlocks were touched with rosy light. He fell to browsing contentedly; and when his appetite was satisfied he pushed on, urged partly by the innate curiosity of his race, partly by a craving for some place that might give him the sense of home. The freedom and solitude of the wilderness were all very well in their way, but the need of something different was bred in his very bones.

As he went he cropped a mouthful here and there, following his incorrigible habit of sampling

everything that was strange to him,—except toadstools. Of these he harboured an inherited suspicion. He would sniff at them, then stamp them to bits with every mark of hostility. Presently he noted the big grey papery globe of a wasps' nest, hanging from a branch just above his head. In that hour of numbing damp and chill not a wasp was stirring abroad. To Bill the nest looked like a ball of grey paper. Among other more or less edible things he rather liked paper. And he knew nothing about wasps. He reached up and took a good bite out of the conical bottom of the nest.

With a startled bleat of pain he spat out the fiery morsel, bucked about three feet into the air, and struck violently at his muzzle with one nimble forehoof. At the same moment half a dozen white-hot needle-points were jabbed into his nostrils. He heard, but gave no heed to, a sudden loud and vicious buzzing. Fortunately for him the furious little "yellow-jackets" were too sluggish with the cold to be very active on their wings. Two or three more spasmodic leaps through the thick undergrowth bore him clear of their vengeance. But their scorching punishment he carried with him. For a few moments he rooted wildly in the damp moss. Then, bleating shrilly with rage and fear and torment, he went tearing through the wood till he chanced upon a little

pool where the water bubbled up ice-cold from its source in the heart of the hills. Into this he plunged his tortured muzzle up to the eyes, and somewhat eased the anguish.

Bill's flesh was healthy, and his system strongly resistant to such poisons as those of insects or snakes; so in a comparatively short time he was little the worse except for a tenderness which led him to choose only the most delicate provender. Somewhat later in the day he caught sight of another of those harmless-looking pale grey papery globes, hanging from a branch. He was just beginning to recover his customary disdainful mood and bearing; but his self-confidence vanished like a pricked bubble and he fled in a panic, not pausing till he had put a mile or more between himself and the dreadful object.

This experience, though bitter, was worth the price, for it saved him, on the following day, from a yet more bitter and disastrous one. As he wandered on through green-and-brown forest aisles, following his vague quest, he was suddenly confronted by a clumsy-looking pepper-and-salt coloured animal, squat and lumpy in build, and about the size of a very large rabbit. The creature had a short black face with a blunt nose and little bad-tempered eyes. At the sight of Bill it paused, its fur suddenly stood up all over till it looked twice its proper size, and its colour changed to a dirty

yellowish white with a blackish undertone. Then it came straight on, in its slow, heavy crawl, squeaking and gnashing its yellow teeth crossly, quite unimpressed by Bill's bulk and his imposing appearance. Had he been in his ordinary unchastened temper Bill would have resented this procedure at once. He would have promptly butted the presumptuous little stranger from his path. He would have got his face, his nose, his eyes, stuck full of deadly porcupine quills, so barbed as never to come out but to work their way steadily inwards. He would have gone staggering about in blind torment till death came mercifully to release him; and this chronicle of his adventures would have come to a melancholy end.

As it was, however, Bill was filled, at the moment, with a wholesome suspicion of what he did not understand. He certainly did not understand a creature which could grow to twice its size in the course of a second. He eyed it with curiosity, not unmingled with apprehension, till it was within two or three feet of him. Then he discreetly stepped aside. And the porcupine waddled slowly past, grunting and squeaking to itself, too indifferent, or too sluggish of wit, apparently, even to wonder what sort of being Bill might be.

III

On the following evening, soon after sunset, Bill came out suddenly upon the bank of a small river, rippling and murmuring over its gravelly shoals. The wide sky was tender with a soft, violet light, and musical with the silver twang of the high-swooping night-hawks, hunting gnats in the quiet air above the tree-tops. Two or three early bats were already zigzagging erratically above the bright water, and the trout were leaping in the smoother reaches of the stream. To Bill this was a most comforting change from the gloom and stillness of the forest. The naked strip between the current and the bank,—now sand, now gravel, now naked, sun-warmed rock—was pleasant to his feet. He sauntered on hopefully downstream, browsing along the bushy edge of the bank as he went, till darkness had fallen and the sky grown thick with stars. Then he settled himself for the night on a patch of warm sand beneath the projecting roots of a half undermined maple, more content than he had been at any time since he had been so rudely dragged from his subservient flock and his old, familiar pasture.

The next morning about sunrise, while the mists were afloat upon the water, Bill rounded a leafy point and came upon a sight which thrilled his lonely heart deliciously. A slim young doe, light-

limbed and stepping daintily, came down to the river's edge to drink. In colour she was of a delicate, ruddy fawn, with cream-white belly, and a clean white patch on her trim stern. Bill felt at once that there was some far-off kinship between her tribe and his; and however remote, he yearned to make the most of it. Holding his great head high, and approaching with delicate, mincing steps so as not to startle the fair stranger, he gave utterance to a harsh bleat, which he meant to be the very last word in caressing allurements. The doe jumped as she lifted her graceful head, and stood staring at Bill with wonder and question in her big dark, liquid eyes. She knew at once that he was not hostile; but he was an amazing apparition, and she was intensely curious. How ugly he seemed to her, with his coarse shaggy coat, long, bearded face, and stout horns sweeping back from his heavy brow! A puff of air brought his scent in her direction. Her fine muzzle wrinkled with distaste, and she sidled away a few paces. But her curiosity held her from flight.

His ardour stimulated by this coy withdrawal, Bill fell to curvetting and prancing, rearing on his hind legs, tossing his horns, showing off to the best of his powers as he drew nearer and nearer. He was careful not to be too hasty, though he was confident that his bold and virile charms could not fail of their effect. They were effective, indeed,

but by no means as he fancied. Not thus was the slim doe desirous to be wooed. She stood her ground till he was within a dozen paces of her. Then, her curiosity quite satisfied, she whisked about on her dainty, pointed hooves, gave a disdainful flirt of her little tail, and went bounding away up the bank and over the bushes in prodigious leaps that carried her twenty-five feet at a time.

With a bleat of piteous appeal Bill raced after her. But not for long. In a few seconds she had vanished utterly. With downcast mien Bill dropped the vain pursuit and moved heavily back to the river. Sore at heart he sniffed for a while at her light footprints. Then he continued his journey downstream. As he went, his disappointment gave way to anger. He had been scorned and flouted shamefully. Not so would his lordly advances have been treated by his admiring little flock in the old home pasture. His wrath at last gave way to homesickness, and he felt very sorry for himself. When, some hours later, a big fox, crossing his path, paused to stare at him with lively interest, he thought it was a yellow dog and trotted forwards playfully, anticipating a rough-and-ready game of tag. Such games,—none too amiable, indeed, but with small hurt to either side,—he had often indulged in with the dogs of his native village. The fox, however, whisked off up

the bank with a snarl and disappeared. Bill continued his journey morosely. In the wilderness nobody loved him. Was it possible that he had made a mistake in parting company with those impertinent but not unfriendly river men whom he had left beside the burning boat? For a moment he was tempted to turn back and look for them; but the impulse faded out as his attention was caught by the sudden shrill clamour of a squirrel showering abuse at him from a branch overhead. It was a familiar sound and he went on with more hope.

Late that evening it chanced that a vagabond Indian, poling his way up-river in his birch canoe from the far-off settlements, had landed, pulled up his light craft, and made camp just a few hundred yards below the spot where Bill, in a deep cleft in the bank, had settled himself for the night. This Indian, unlike most of the men of his shrewd breed, was rather a simple-minded rascal, shiftless and thieving, fuddled with drink when he could get it and always something of a butt both in his native village far upstream and in the settlements where he was wont to sell his baskets. It was strictly against the law to sell spirits to the Indians; but on this last visit "Poke," as he was called derisively, had found a dishonest trader, who had obligingly accepted all his basket money in return for a few bottles of fiery "Square Face."

Already mildly "oiled," though his task of poling against the stiff current had forced him to be moderate, Poke had now but one idea. This was to indulge himself, free from all distractions, in a blissful orgy of fire-water. The night was bland and clear. He had no need of a shelter. He did not trouble even to unload the canoe. Bringing ashore only his blanket, a hunk of bread, and two of his precious, square, black bottles of gin, he spread the blanket at the foot of a steep rock and hurriedly lighted his little camp-fire. Then, squatted beside the companionable blaze, with a grunt of luxurious anticipation he dug out the cork with his sheath-knife and took a generous draft of the raw liquor.

Alternately munching chunks of bread and drinking avidly from the black bottle, Poke was soon in a condition when the world seemed to him a glorious place. Cold, hunger, pain, toil, weariness were things which had never been and never more would be. Rocking himself slowly on his haunches and occasionally muttering quietly, he stared into the little fire, feeding it from time to time with dry sticks till his copper-coloured, foolishly grinning face glowed in the dancing of the flame.

Suddenly a sharp sound of footsteps on the gravel at the other side of the fire made him look up, stupidly enraged at the interruption. All he saw

was Bill's great horned and bearded head, with the big yellow eyes aglare in the firelight, gazing at him fixedly from around the corner of the rock. Never before had he seen such a head, such awful blazing eyes. But he had dreamed of something like it, after listening to the priest's description of the hell that awaited evil-doers. His fuddled brain leaped to the conclusion that this was none other than the Devil himself, come to snatch him off to eternal torment. With a yell of horror he sprang to his feet, hurled the bottle—now quite empty—at the dreadful vision, thrust off and fell into his canoe, and went paddling frantically downstream. It was not the direction he wished to go in, but it was the quickest path of flight.

Bill, who had come with the most friendly intentions, seeking human company and hospitality, had jumped back into the shadows with a startled snort as the bottle crashed loudly on the rock beside his head. He came forth again at once, however, stared after the fugitive for a moment, and then stepped around to examine the little fire and the abandoned blanket. Finding a crust of the bread left, he joyously devoured it. He seized the blanket and tried to toss it in the air; but as he was standing upon it with his forefeet it resisted him. This excited and amused him, and he proceeded to have some fun with it, enjoying himself immensely.

The frightened Poke, daring at last to glance back over his shoulder, was horrified to see a black horned shape, looking to him as big as a horse, dancing diabolically about the fire, and flapping an awful, dusky wing. In his panic he threw overboard his last bottle, and it was months before he would taste another drop, or steal so much as a potato.

Tiring at last of his antics with the blanket and cheered by a feeling that he had once more come in contact with humanity, Bill lay down beside the rock and gazed at the dying fire until he fell asleep.

It was early in the following afternoon when Bill came upon the first signs of human habitation in the wilderness. Forced by a deep and still bayou, or backwater, to turn his steps far inland, he traversed a low ridge clothed with beech-trees, and saw before him a pleasant valley, with the roofs of a log cabin and a low barn showing in the distance. There were several wide patches of roughly tilled clearing, with blackened, half-burned stumps sticking up through the crops of potato and buckwheat. Immediately before him was a very crude but substantial snake-fence of brushwood and poles, enclosing a rugged pasture. And in that pasture was a sight that rejoiced his soul.

Among the low green bushes and grey boulders

five sheep were feeding—two white ones and three black. These latter, called black by courtesy, were rather of a rusty brown, with black head and legs. Bill was acquainted with sheep, and had always recognized them, condescendingly, as humbler and uninteresting kin to the aristocratic tribe of the goats. But all the sheep he had seen hitherto had been white ones, very fat, and woolly, and futile. These three brown ewes, leggy and nimble, reminded him of his own light-footed flock, and his heart went out to them. But his experiences in this strange land had taught him caution. He was afraid that unless he should make his advances gently, these altogether desirable creatures might vanish, as the doe had done, and leave him again to his loneliness.

The sheep were pasturing at some distance to his right near a corner of the fence which was fairly overhung by dense forest. He would go over and try talking to them nicely through the fence before thrusting his company upon them in his usual swaggering way. He was quick to learn, was Bill, and this time he was not taking any risks. He moved as quietly, now, through the underbrush as if he had been born to it.

Bill had almost reached the point he was aiming at, when an appalling thing happened. One of the brown ewes was lying down, peacefully ruminating, quite close to the fence, and with her back to

it. Nothing was further from her simple mind than any possible peril. Suddenly a great black shape seemed to drop over the fence just behind her and fall forward upon her. In the next instant, as she jumped to her feet with a terrified "baa-a-a," a mighty paw descended upon her and she sank down again, with her back broken. The shaggy bulk of her slaughterer almost hid her from view as his jaws fixed themselves greedily in her throat. The rest of the flock raced down the pasture with wild bleatings.

It required no previous knowledge of bears to inform Bill that this black monster would be a terrible, a deadly, antagonist. But his bold heart, almost bursting with rage, took no account of the odds. Already in his sight those ewes were his. With one magnificent bound, barely touching the top rail, he was over the fence. In the next he launched himself, head down. With all his weight and all his fury behind it, his iron front struck the bear in the most sensitive part of the flank, just behind the ribs.

With a gasping cough the bear, caught unprepared, rolled clear of his victim. He was dazed and breathless for a second; but before his amazing assailant could repeat the stroke he recovered himself. Crouched back on his haunches, his little furious eyes fixed upon the foe with the wariness of a trained boxer, he held one great iron-clawed

paw uplifted in readiness for a blow that should settle the fight.

Bill was a crafty fighter as well as a daring one. He had danced back some paces, for room to gather momentum. He was just on the point of charging again when he grasped his adversary's tactics. He had seen what that mighty paw could do. He leaped to one side, and dashed in from another angle. But the bear whirled nimbly on his haunches to confront him again; and he swerved just in time to evade the pile-driver stroke. It was, in fact, a close shave.

And now Bill began a manœuvre which his great adversary found most annoying. He danced around the bear, thrusting and feinting, and ever circling, ever challenging; while the bear was kept turning, turning, turning on his haunches till fairly beside himself with rage. At last he made a lightning rush, hoping to end the matter. But his elusive foe was beyond reach in an instant, as swiftly and lightly as if blown by the wind of his rush. With a savage growl he sprang back to seize again the carcass of his victim. Just as he reached it, something like the fall of a hillside struck him full on the rump, and propelled him clean over it. He had made a mistake in turning his back on Bill, even for a second. There was nothing for him to do but crouch on his haunches again, and face once more his ever-mocking, ever-circling opponent.

The remaining ewes, meanwhile, somewhat recovered from their panic, were standing huddled together at a discreet distance, watching the battle with awe. It was plain, even to their somewhat limited perceptions, that the bearded and prancing stranger was their champion—a champion even so bold as to defy a bear. Strange as he was, their simple souls admired him.

At this juncture of affairs a loud and very angry shouting turned all eyes—even those of the bear and Bill—towards the other side of the field. A long-legged man in grey homespuns, bareheaded, and swinging an axe, came into view over the curve of the hill. He had been working in the field below the pasture, and had seen the sheep running wildly. As he raced with long strides over the hillocks, his appearance and his language struck panic to the heart of the bear. That sagacious beast knew Man. He had no wish to face a man alone, still less a man plus Bill. He made a wild dash for the fence. Just as he was going over it,—the top rail breaking under his weight,—Bill caught him again like a catapult, low down in the stern, between the thighs,—a devastating blow. With a squeal he went over, landing on his snout, and fled away through the thickets with no more dignity than a scared rabbit.

The tall man stopped beside the body of the ewe and stood leaning on his axe. He was indig-

nant and sore at the destruction of his beast; but his sporting spirit was more interested in Bill.

"Some goat!" he remarked with admiring emphasis. "Some scrapper! Say, old son, I wish we'd had you with us over in France."

Bill, immensely pleased with himself, but also pleased with the man's voice, so obviously friendly, came prancing towards him, half expecting a carrot or a lump of sugar as a reward for his performance. Seeing that no titbit was forthcoming, he paused irresolutely.

"Shoo!" said the man. "Buzz off now, son, and join the ladies. See where they're waitin' for yeh over there. *I'll* see to this poor bit of mutton."

Bill's eyes and thoughts were already turning in that direction, and just as if he had understood the man's words, he trotted over to join the huddled ewes. Uneasy at his strange appearance, they shifted and shrank a little; but he approached so gently, so diffidently, that their fears were soon allayed. A moment more and he was among them, rubbing noses with each in turn. Having thus accepted his presence, the ewes placidly fell to pasturing again, as if nothing unusual had happened. But Bill, for a long while too happy to feed, kept moving about the flock, from time to time shaking his horns at the forest as if defying all its perils to trespass on his new kingdom.

MIXED BREED

I

GHOSTLY white under the flooding spring moonlight, the sheep lay contentedly ruminating amid the old stumps and close-bitten hillocks of the upland pasture. A huge black-and-tan dog—long-limbed, deep-chested, with longish, slightly waving coat and richly feathered tail, like a collie's—came trotting up towards them with a business-like air. At a distance of some ten paces he paused, and, contemplatively waving his tail, cast a keen glance over the flock.

The nearest ewes stopped chewing and eyed him with a mild disfavour, prepared to rise and move in among their fellows if he should come any closer. The rest of the flock appeared to ignore him. They did not fear him. In fact, his presence gave them a sense of added security, there in this wide, naked pasture field with the blackness of the ancient, untamed forest crowding close along the frail barrier of zigzag rail fence. In a dim way they realized that he was responsible for their safety—that he was their protector

from the perils which prowled or lurked in the forest shades.

Of his powers as a protector they had a keen appreciation; but in those very powers their deeper instincts recognized something from which they shrank uneasily. Ancestral memories, formless and infinitely remote, kept them on their guard, and their noncommittal eyes, lazily half closed, followed his every movement as long as he was near them.

Apparently satisfied with his inspection the big dog skirted the flock at a brisk trot and ran on to the fence. Here he sniffed along the rails for perhaps a couple of hundred yards in each direction, occasionally thrusting his muzzle through them between the roughly split poles, and sampling the forest smells with his discriminating nostrils.

The soft night wind drew outwards from the forest, across the pasture, and brought him a mixture of savours, all of which his delicate sense sorted out unerringly. He smelled the balsamy tang of spruce and fir, the faint wintergreen breath of the birches, the harsh, chill earthiness from a near-by patch of alder swamp. He caught the almost imperceptible scent of a hare, passing at some distance behind the trees, and cocked an ear with interest as it was followed, almost immediately, by the pungent musk of a fox.

Then his nose wrinkled at the taint of a passing weasel.

There was no sign or hint anywhere of danger to the flock. He was not anticipating danger, indeed; for the bears and lynxes, at this season of plenty and good hunting, were not hanging about the neighbourhood of the settlements and courting trouble with the quick-shooting backwoods farmers.

Having thus fulfilled his duty towards his master's flocks, Bran—for that was the big dog's name—continued on along the fence, absorbed in his own private affairs. He was smelling for rabbits, or weasels, or ground squirrels, or any creature alive and active—skunks and porcupines alone strictly barred—which might afford him some sport and ease a certain restless craving that was tormenting him.

He had gone but a few yards when he picked up the fresh trail of a rabbit. Bounding forwards eagerly, he dashed around a dense clump of juniper—and almost collided with a ewe who was standing over her new-born lamb.

On the instant, the dauntless mother charged at him furiously, with lowered head—so swiftly that, as he sprang aside, she caught him a savage butt on the hind-quarters, nearly knocking him over. With a snarl of surprise and wrath he leaped out of reach; and the ewe, returning to her

little one, fell to licking it anxiously. It was just old enough to stand upon its awkward, trembling legs; and she stood over it, alternately coaxing it to nurse and stamping defiantly at Bran.

II

As for Bran, his first impulse had been to spring upon his assailant; but his deepest instinct forbade him. To harm her was unlawful. She was part of his master's property, and, as such, sacred. At a discreet distance—the rabbit trail forgotten—he sat up on his haunches and regarded her.

In themselves, the ewe and her ridiculous offspring were of less than no concern to him; but his deep sense of responsibility for his master's property made him uneasy at seeing her so close to the fence and the forest. He knew that sheep were fools, of course; but she might have had sense enough to establish her nursery somewhere behind a big stump well down in the pasture, where her helpless young would not be a temptation to every forest marauder.

He would have liked to drive them both back to the flock, or at least to a safe distance from the fence; but he knew that the foolish and excited mother was in no mood to take a hint. Further, it was obvious that the lamb was as yet too feeble to walk. Unable to make up his mind what to do,

he turned his back upon the problem, and sat watching the flock, his fine tail spread, slack and dejected, upon the dewy turf.

Obviously a mongrel, Bran was, like many mongrels, an altogether magnificent specimen of doghood. Fine breeds had gone to his making. His mother had been a big Yukon sledge dog, part Husky, part Newfoundland, with a strong strain of the wolf quite near the surface. His father had been a cross between collie and Airedale; and an expert might have picked out marks of all these strong strains in his physical make-up, although the blend was perfect, unless, perhaps, for some contrast between the intelligent, benevolent breadth of his skull above the eyes and the wolfish rake of his long, powerful jaws.

Heredity plays some queer tricks, no less in dogs than in men; and in Bran's temperament the distinctive traits of his varied ancestry lay in tangled and often sharply conflicting strands, instead of being wrought into a harmonious whole.

Now, balked in his hunting and in a distinctly bad humour, he revealed by the expression in his eyes as he sat watching the peaceful flock among the moonlit hillocks and stumps, a mood that grew to be something far from benevolent. Little by little his lips drew back, disclosing his long, white fangs.

Stealthily, almost imperceptibly to himself, a

savage impulse began to creep up, itching, into his brain. He felt presently a fierce craving to dash down among the silly, comfortable flock, and scatter them—to see them fleeing in wild terror before him—to slash at their tender, woolly throats—to feel the gush of their hot sweet blood upon his tongue. Even so would that ancestral timber wolf have felt, watching, from behind a bush in the Yukon wilds, the approach of an unsuspecting little herd of caribou.

But Bran never moved. A more dominant strain in his temperament woke up, and called him sharply to his senses. His fangs vanished from view. The greenish fire faded from his eyes. A sense of shame chilled his spirit. With a guilty air he rose and turned to trot back to the farm-yard, his impulse to slaughter even rabbits quite extinguished for the moment.

III

He had not gone far, however, on his homeward journey, when he was surprised to hear from behind him that dull, pattering rush which is the unmistakable sound of a flock of sheep stampeding. His flock, so quiet but a half minute before, were tearing across the pasture in wild panic, now scattering hither and thither in small bunches, now closing again into a huddled mob as they ran,

only to be scattered apart again instantly, as if by an explosion in their midst.

In the trail of the flight he saw two sheep down on their sides, kicking feebly. In the broad white flood of the moonlight he saw clearly that their throats were torn out. He ran towards them, but, for the moment, he ran slowly, in bewilderment and indecision. The scene was just his own savage dream of five minutes back come true, and his conscience shook him.

Then he saw the slayer—a tall, slender, bluish grey dog, a half-breed greyhound from the next settlement, miles away on the other side of the ridge. The stranger was just emerging from the confusion, having succeeded in cutting out an unhappy ewe and heading off her frantic efforts to rejoin her fellows.

On the instant Bran's perceptions cleared. The thick mane along his neck lifted with rage, and a deep growl rumbled in his throat, as he launched himself at top speed across the hillocks. The grey marauder was too much engrossed to see the approaching peril. He was delaying his victim's fate, heading her off ever farther from the flock, playing with her anguish of terror as a cat plays with a mouse.

At length, tiring of this play, and fearful lest the rest of the flock should escape him, he sprang in, with the sure aim of the practised killer. The

helpless ewe gave one shrill bleat of despair. Then her throat was torn open, and she went down beneath her slayer—just as Bran landed upon them like a thunderbolt.

The black-and-tan dog felt a gush of hot blood in his face and nostrils; and then his long jaws closed inexorably upon the side of the grey beast's throat as he jerked him off his prey.

It was in no sense a fight, this that followed. Bran, the heavier and stronger as well as the more savage, had secured the one perfect, absolutely fatal grip. His opponent could do nothing but struggle impotently, with choked gasping and gurglings, striving to keep his feet while Bran worried him like a rat. In half a minute he was down, all four feet in the air, curled together and pawing convulsively; and then in a few seconds his body straightened out and fell slack.

For a little while, with fiercer growls, Bran continued to worry the unresisting form. Then, scornfully dropping it from his jaws, he lifted his blood-stained head and glanced about him keenly. Except for the three slaughtered ewes, the flock was all together, huddled in a compact, trembling white mass at the farther side of the pasture, as far as possible from the forest and its terrors.

Feeling that he had fulfilled his duty to the utmost, Bran turned about and with his hind paws

contemptuously kicked a few scraps of turf over his victim. Then he trotted home to the farm-yard, crept into his kennel, and settled himself to sleep.

IV

It was not out of love for his master, by any means, that Bran was so careful to guard that master's property. It was simply a fundamental article of the code which he inherited from the Newfoundland and collie side of his ancestry. Ben Parsons, the big, red-faced, hard-eyed farmer, was his master. To Ben Parsons he owed his food, his shelter and therefore his loyal service. That was enough for Bran.

There was no question of love, or even of the most temperate liking. Ben Parsons was not one to inspire, or to desire, anything approaching affection in man or beast. All the stock on his farm feared and distrusted him, in spite of the fact that they were in the main well treated. He had too clear an understanding of his own interests not to know that good treatment secured him good value. From his hired help he got fair service, for which he gave fair pay in wage and keep, and so he prospered; but no one ever stayed long in his employ.

From Bran he got obedience, but no servility. To him the great inscrutable-eyed, huge-eating

dog was well worth his rations and the ten dollars that Ben had paid for him as a puppy, for the protection which he afforded to the farm.

It was towards noon when Parsons tramped up to the sheep pasture to see if all was well with his flock, a bunch of high-grade southdowns in which he took much pride. Bran accompanied him, not trotting at his heels, but ranging about with an air of responsibility.

The flock was pasturing—contentedly, for sheep have short memories—near the home fence of the pasture. The ewe which had given birth to her lamb the night before had rejoined the flock with her gawky offspring; but the owner's eye was quick to notice that three were missing. He glanced about the field.

“Seek 'em!” he said sharply.

Bran pricked up his ears, eyed Parsons inquiringly for a moment, then led him straight to the little hollow behind a big grey stump where one of the victims was lying.

To Parsons the sight of the torn throat was instant evidence that here was the work of that most hated of marauders, a sheep-killing dog. There could be no doubt as to who was the culprit. Bran was the only big dog in the whole settlement, the only dog with dangerous blood in his veins.

He turned and looked at Bran, a deadly rage

seething in his heart and gleaming from his steel-hard eyes. Bran, on the other side of the carcass, sniffed at it for a moment, and growled and bared his fangs as he thought of the other dog.

Had Ben Parsons had his gun with him, Bran's fate would have been settled on the spot; but he had not even a stick. His big fingers clenched viciously, but he was no fool. He was not going to tackle a mighty beast like Bran naked-handed. He controlled himself, and planned vengeance later—a safe vengeance. Bran should be disabled by a well-placed shot, and then beaten to death, without haste. The matter could wait.

Bran looked up and met his master's eyes with the confident gaze of a commending conscience; but as he sensed the hate, the deadly purpose, in those cold blue eyes, his own underwent a change, and an angry green light flickered in their depths.

But habit, training, the master instinct, conquered him. He turned and trotted straight to the other victim. Parsons followed, and gave but one look, icy now with the rage that was forced to bide its time. Hardly pausing, Bran led him on to the third victim, with the torn grey body of his slayer lying stretched out beside it. With a gesture of unutterable scorn, Bran kicked some dirt upon the corpse, then moved off a few paces, sat up

on his haunches and glared at his master with an expression of smouldering hostility.

Ben Parsons stared down upon that gaunt and long-jawed corpse, so terribly mauled, and understood the whole situation. There was no spark of generous warmth in his make-up. Even while congratulating himself that he had not perpetrated the folly of killing such a valuable dog as Bran, he nursed a certain grudge against him for not having intervened more promptly. He dwelt more on the three sheep slain than on the rest of the flock saved.

He set off for the stables, to get a horse and drag, in order to haul the carcasses home—the sheep to be skinned, the dog as evidence in his claim for damages. As he went, he whistled Bran to follow him; but the black-and-tan, apparently, failed to hear the summons. He was already far up the pasture, sniffing along beside the fence for the scent of a rabbit. He had no use for Ben Parsons at the moment.

v

That same night just before moonrise, Bran came forth from his kennel and stood surveying the wide, shadowy farm-yard, the two big, square barns black against the glimmering sky; the long, low, open-fronted shed for wood and carts; the

lean, white-painted frame house; the lamp-lit kitchen window close shut against the sweet and mild spring air.

Conflicting impulses warred sharply in his blood. For all the comfortable scene he felt a warm affection—a certain sense of proprietorship, almost, because he was there to guard it from the unknown perils of the night. He heard the two heavy bay draft horses pawing gently as they nosed the fodder in their mangers. They were Bran's friends, and his heart went out to them. He heard the soft lowing of one of the cows in the home pasture behind the shed. He liked the cattle—dull, to be sure, but rather amiable!

In his veins, however, there was stirring a fever that would not be quenched. Into his mouth came again the thrilling taste of that gush of hot blood from the ewe's torn throat as he had closed with her slayer. He licked his lips and gave an uneasy whine.

At that moment the heavy figure of Ben Parsons, pipe in mouth, appeared between the window and the lamp, gazing out into the dusk. Bran growled softly, with sudden aversion, at the sight; and the wolf strain triumphed. He trotted off towards the forest, athirst to hunt something, to kill something, if only a rabbit. In reality he craved a quarry that would struggle, that would resist, that he could slake his blood lust upon. If

only he might strike the trail of one of those splendid red deer which he had occasionally seen staring over the pasture fence!

His way to the forest led him up through the sheep pasture. The moon was just rising, red and distorted, through the jagged black tops of the fir trees on the ridge, casting long, sinister shadows across the hillocks. The sheep were lying down. He merely glanced at them in passing, for just now he had no mind to look after their protection.

In that moment the picture of the long-limbed grey slayer, as he scattered and tore the flock in the ecstasy of the chase, flashed across Bran's memory. His jaws slavered with a gust of horrid sympathy and understanding. He realized at last that it was *sheep* he wanted to kill; but not, assuredly not, *these* sheep! These sheep he had fought for. They were his own. Let any intruder touch them at his peril!

He trotted straight on, then broke into a run, leaped the fence, and plunged into the forest. His purpose was now clear to him, and nothing should turn him from it!

In the woods it was dark, except where the low moon sent long fingers of elfish radiancy between the black trunks and down the silent glades. To Bran, going swiftly and without any thought of secrecy or stealth, the solitude seemed empty of all life; for all the furtive creatures of the wild,

the savage and the timorous alike, hid themselves or froze into invisibility at the approach of this redoubtable intruder, who carried with him the added prestige of his alliance with man.

From time to time the scent of some tempting quarry would catch Bran's nostrils, but he was too fixed upon his purpose to be tempted. He raced on steadily, swishing through the young green brakes, crashing over the low blueberry bushes, skirting the denser thickets, threading the ancient trunks, leaping the occasional windfalls—his long and tireless gallop eating up the miles without effort. He topped the naked granite crest of the divide, spectral white in the pour of the new high-floating moon; and swept on down, through whispering groves of young birch and silver poplar, into the bosom of the white Ottanoonsis Valley.

Bran knew of a spacious sheep pasture on the lower slopes, where dwelt a white-fleeced flock which had lately been guarded by a certain tall, grey-blue dog, very swift of foot but fatally lacking in judgment. That dog had trespassed, and murdered, and met his deserts. To Bran it seemed that there would be a measure of justice, of retaliatory vengeance, in visiting the slayer's crime upon the slayer's own charges.

But Bran was prudent, for all the deadly lust in his veins. The old guardian was dead, indeed, but already a new one might have been appointed;

and he did not wish to be disturbed in the orgy he was promising himself. The new guardian of the flock, if there were one, must first be settled with. And then—and then—the ecstasy of the chase, the slaughter, and the slaking of his fiery thirst!

Through the rough rail fence he scrutinized, long and warily, the empty, bright expanse of the pasture, and the flock huddled, peacefully ruminating, beneath the glassy radiance in a remote corner of the field. Warily keeping ever in the shadows, he made a complete circuit of the field, a systematic reconnaissance.

It was about three o'clock in the morning. All was clear. All was quiet. The farmhouse and the farm-yard, hidden behind a windbreak of dense fir trees, gave no sign of life. In the single straggling street of the settlement village, half a mile below, not a window was lighted. There was not a sound on the air but the soft rush of the Ottonosis against the two piers of its wooden bridge.

VI

With savage exultation Bran leaped the fence and dashed upon the flock.

For the moment he did no killing. He was not yet quite worked up to it. He craved the fierce excitement of the chase; and for a few seconds the flock, too astonished to be really frightened,

merely scattered sluggishly to avoid him. Two or three he nipped severely. Their sudden, pitious bleats were not to be misunderstood. Then swift panic seized the flock, and they ran, frantically.

The young lambs, left sprawling and bleating behind, Bran ignored. They were too petty game for him. Moreover, he would not have touched them in any case. His murder lust could not carry him so low as that. He pranced among them wildly for a moment, just to give the quarry a start, and then, with bared fangs and eyes flaming green, he tore in pursuit.

The first that he overtook, a heavy ewe, he sprang upon like a wolf. Her knees gave way beneath her, her outstretched muzzle buried itself in the damp turf—and Bran tore her throat out as he had seen the grey dog do.

Then a strange thing happened to him. With none of the ecstasy of gratifying a mad craving, the taste of his victim's blood shocked him back to sanity. It was like a douche of iced water in his face. He stood rigid, frozen, and stared about him like one awaking from a tremendous dream. That old wolf forbear of his had at last been glutted. The mad fire faded from his eyes. His fine tail drooped slowly, and at last went fairly between his legs, as a sense of intolerable and unpardonable guilt swept over him.

With that sense of guilt came fear, which he had never known before. He had cut himself off from man. Retribution would await him everywhere. Never again could he return to the old farm. He whipped about and fled as if a pack of devils were at his heels.

Just at this moment, from behind the fir grove, appeared the farmer, the owner of the flock. Aroused, too late, by the vague but prolonged commotion in the sheep pasture, he had seized his gun—which hung ready loaded, on the kitchen wall—and run out to see what was the matter. Grasping the whole situation at a glance in that revealing white light, he took a hasty shot at the fleeing Bran.

It was not a good shot, fortunately. One of the big scattering pellets alone caught Bran, with a sting like a hot iron, on the side of the rump, just as he disappeared, with a startled yelp, over the top of the fence.

Speechless with indignation, the farmer strode across the field and surveyed the torn victim and the panic-stricken flock. The backwoods vocabulary is rich in varied and biting expletives; but words, here, were futile. He had recognized Bran, of course. He had already received an energetic demand from Ben Parsons for the price of three valuable sheep, their value being by no means understated in the claim.

“But I’ll git even with Ben for this,” he muttered at last; “him an’ his dawg too, by God!”

Into the heart of the densest thicket he could find, trembling with shame and smarting from his surface wound, Bran slunk and hid himself. The spirit of two thousand generations of his ancestors—faithful friends of man since the dim ages of flint spearhead and cave-mouth fire—whispered scathingly in his conscience, upbraiding him for his crime.

He rolled and rooted in the wet moss and moist earth, striving to cleanse himself of the blood taint which now he loathed. The smart of his wound he hardly troubled to assuage, though from time to time he would lick at it despondently. What to do, or where to go, he had for the time no notion whatever. He had become that saddest and most aimless of four-foot creatures, a masterless dog.

VII

At about half past eleven that same morning, in the shade of a wide-branched maple which overhung the river bank, Dave Stonor sat on a log smoking, and reading a shabby volume, while he waited for his kettle to boil. His compact little woodsman’s fire was built between two stones close by, well in the shadow, that it might burn the better.

At the edge of the water, some twenty-five yards away—for the river had fallen, and there was a strip of gravelly beach between the wooded bank and the dimpling current—the prow of his loaded canoe was drawn up. Halting at the settlement that morning to buy milk and fresh bread, he had heard all about Bran's raid on the sheep pasture. Both Bran and Bran's owner, Ben Parsons, he had long known by reputation, though his house was nearly forty miles farther up the Otta-noonsis; for in the backwoods the minutest affairs of everyone are known and discussed for leagues about. It is almost as if each man's—and woman's—hairs were all numbered.

When, therefore, Dave Stonor saw a huge black-and-tan dog, with a splendid head, emerge cautiously from the bushes a little farther upstream, and slink, with a slight limp, down to the water's edge, he understood a great deal at once, and thought rapidly. He loved dogs. He knew Bran's pedigree. He had no liking for Ben Parsons. He had never owned a sheep. Bran's crime was more or less venial in his eyes.

The great dog drank greedily. Then he stood gazing across towards the opposite bank, as if making up his mind to swim over.

At this moment Dave Stonor intervened.

"Bran!" said he. "Come here!"

Bran jumped as if shot, turned his head to stare

at the speaker, and seemed uncertain whether to plunge into the stream or dash back into the cover of the woods. He stared inquiringly at the smallish, motionless figure seated on the log. He met a pair of greyish brown eyes, kindly but very masterful, very compelling, fixed steadily upon him.

“Come here, Bran! Come here, I tell you!” repeated Stonor, more sharply.

There was something in that voice of authority, so assured, yet so subtly sympathetic, that poured balm upon Bran’s sick and desolate spirit. It gave him confidence. It seemed to restore him to his forfeited fellowship with man. He had never heard a voice like that before.

He came slowly towards Stonor, but he came very humbly, his ears drooping, his fine tail between his legs. He expected punishment, but he came gladly.

As he approached, Stonor tossed him a lump of cold meat. With an apologetic glance, Bran bolted it gratefully. Then he crept to the man’s knees.

“Lay down, you bloody murderer!” commanded Stonor.

The dog obeyed at once, comforted to feel that he had acquired a master. That master placed a moccasined foot gently on his back, rubbed his broad, intelligent head, and pulled his ears with a decisive roughness. Then, dropping his eyes to

some lines in the well-thumbed volume that he had been reading, he remarked with the backwoods drawl:

“Must 'a' took a damn big conscience to make a coward of a dawg like you!”

In reply, Bran gave a small whimper of gratitude. He had been pardoned, and accepted.

By this time the kettle was boiling, but Dave Stonor paid no attention to it. He was thinking hard. He had tired of the backwoods. He had made some money by his work in the lumber camps, and saved it. He was on his way down to the city, a hundred and fifty miles away. There he intended to take train across the continent, and go north into the vast Yukon Territory prospecting for gold.

Bran's life was forfeit. It would be absurd to regard him any longer as the property of Ben Parsons—who was no good anyhow. Bran should not die. He should go to the Yukon with Stonor. What a leader for his dog team! And what a friend and companion in the great solitudes!

Dave Stonor got up briskly, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, emptied the kettle, and scattered and beat out the fire.

“We're a mite too nigh the settlement here,” he remarked to Bran, who hung close at his heels. “We'll git right on, an' stop fur grub a few miles farther down.”

Rearranging the dunnage in the canoe to make place for his unlooked-for passenger, he made Bran get in and lie down; and he took the precaution to throw a blanket over him. Then he stepped delicately into the stern, seated himself, picked up his broad-bladed paddle, and started off downstream with mighty strokes.

“Lay still an’ keep quiet!” he commanded sharply. “I’m taking you where there ain’t no sheep, an’ where there ain’t going to be no temptation to backsliding!”

QUEEN BOMBA OF THE HONEY-POTS

I

IN THE hot, honey-scented, murmurous dark of the bees' nest, deep-hidden in the bank beneath the wild-rose thicket, the burly young queen, Bomba of the bumblebees, was seized with a sudden inexplicable restlessness. When she had emerged, two days before, from her cocoon-cell weak on her legs, bedraggled, and dazed by the busy crowding stir of the nest, she had been tenderly fed with thin honey by the great Queen-Mother herself, and cleaned and caressed by two or three of her sturdy little bustling worker-sisters. But as soon as she was strong enough to look after herself, and had found her way to the well-supplied communal honey-pots, she was amiably ignored, as everyone in the nest was working at high pressure. She had dutifully fallen to with the rest, and found her time well occupied in feeding the ever-hungry larvæ in their cells. But now this task no longer contented her. For the moment she did not know what she wanted. She went blundering here and there over the combs, shouldering the little workers aside, and paying

no heed whatever to the tiny, insatiable mouths in the brood-cells. Then, suddenly, her desires took definite shape. It was change she wanted, and space, and a free wing, and the unknown air. With a deep buzz of decision she rushed to the big waxen honey-pot beside the entrance of the nest, sucked up enough of the thin honey to fill her crop with comfort, then hurriedly crawled along the narrow tunnel which led to the outer world. In her quest for the great adventure she was oblivious to the stream of workers which she passed on the way.

At the exit, half hidden by a tuft of grass, she stopped short, as the first full glare of daylight struck her in the face. For the moment she was half minded to turn back into the familiar dark. But her sturdy spirit forbade any such ignominy. She crept out into the warm grass. Warm scents and soft airs encouraged her. She spread her wings, and stretched them; and at last, lured by the dazzle of sunshine beyond the shadow of the bank, she sprang into the air and went winging off, with a deep droning hum of elation, into the mysterious spaces of green and sheen and bloom.

As she took wing she was accosted by three or four ardent young males of her race—square-built, burly, black-and-orange beaux, hardly half her size but full of energy and enterprise. At this moment, however, their eager wooing left her cold.

She was set on exploring the new and wonderful world which had just been revealed to her. Impatiently eluding her wooers she boomed away over the sun-steeped meadow, and pounced down upon a patch of late-flowering purple clover. Here she revelled for an hour or two among the honey-eyed blossoms, plunging her long tongue to the very bottom of the deep and narrow tubes where the nectar lay concealed, and disturbing a host of tiny foraging flies. From the meadow she flew over a tall green hedge, and swung down into the many-coloured tangle of an old-fashioned garden, where all the flowers of late summer were holding a riot of bloom. Over this profusion of riches she went quite wild for a time, sampling nectar of a dozen flavours and pollen of many varied hues, squeezing her broad, black-and-yellow head and shoulders into the foxgloves and the snapdragons, rollicking about in the wide radiant bowls of the hollyhock blossoms, rifling the pale blue campanulas, diving bodily into the Canterbury Bells, and giving voice to shrill, squeaking buzzes of excitement and impatience whenever she felt her quarters too restricted. Once a tall being, all in white, came moving slowly down the garden walk, pausing at times to examine or to sniff at a glowing blossom. Bomba circled around the stranger's head several times, in amiable curiosity, and then, attracted by a vivid gleam of scarlet, droned off

to the other side of the garden to investigate a row of tall poles draped to their tops with flowering runner-beans.

Late in the afternoon, when the shadows were lengthening across the garden and a strange chill, such as she had never dreamt of in the home nest, began to make the air seem less friendly, Bomba flew off to an ancient brick wall which faced westward and was still bathed in sunshine. This wall was clothed with rambler roses, pink, white, and deep crimson. The mass of bloom was humming with life,—with flies of innumerable kinds, with green and bronze beetles, honey-bees, slim, dapper wasps, and workers, drones and big queens of Bomba's own species. She ignored them all alike, happy in her care-free independence. But when the chill in the air grew fresher she forsook the revels, slipped in under the veil of blossom and leaves, and crept drowsily into a crevice in the sun-warmed bricks. Here she slept away the starlit night, and never emerged next day till the sun was high in the blue and the last of the dew was vanishing from the garden world.

As she crawled out upon a crimson rose, and stood basking in the sun, her broad velvet bands of black and gold richly aglow, she was aware of a curiously attractive perfume which was not of the flower. It was somehow more living and vital, and of more personal significance to herself.

It excited her strangely. Presently she became aware that it emanated from an attractive drone of her species, who was hovering close above her, humming persuasively. Of more compliant mood to-day than when first she left the nest, she rose into the air to meet this scented wooer; and the two soared away slowly together, on their mating flight, over the gay-hued patterns of the garden.

Her lover, however, and her interest in lovers, being very soon forgotten, Bomba passed the brief remnant of the summer in careless vagrancy. This was the one time of holiday that her life, predestined to toil, would ever afford. For the present she had nothing to do but feast through the hours of sun, and doze away the hours of dark or storm in the shelter of her cranny in the brick wall, and all the time, though she knew it not, she was laying up strength and substance to last her through her long winter's sleep beneath the snow.

As the honey-bearing blossoms passed away with the passing summer, Bomba began to realize that a sinister change was approaching, and the instinct inherited from a million generations of ancestors warned her that her cranny in the brick wall would soon be an insufficient shelter. Long and earnest search at last yielded her a site that seemed suitable for her winter's retreat. On a dry knoll of sandy loam stood a spreading beech-

tree, and in the light soil beneath one of its roots she proceeded to dig her burrow. She did not, as might have been expected, choose the sunny side of the tree, but rather, in her prevision, the shadowed north, in order that the early, deceiving warmth of the following spring might not awaken her too soon and lure her forth to her doom in a world not yet ready for her.

Not being a very expert digger as compared with some of her remote cousins, she spent several arduous days in tunnelling a narrow tube about four inches in depth. The end of this tunnel she enlarged to a circular chamber wherein she could curl up comfortably. Here, for the next week or two, she spent the chill nights and the wet or lowering days, only coming forth when the noon sun tempted her. But when the few remaining late flowers were all rifled of their honey, and the dancing flies were all gone, and the bedraggled garden looked sorrowful and neglected, and even at high noon the air had a menacing nip in its caress, she felt an irresistible drowsiness creeping over her. Half asleep already, she crawled into her dry, warm burrow, and forthwith sank into a slumber too deep for dreams. The days grew shorter, the nights longer and darker, frosts slew the final valiant blossoms, and at last the snow came, silently, and buried meadow, grove, and garden far from sight—almost, it would seem,

from memory. Wild storms swept over the white, enshrouded earth, and savage cold scourged the unsheltered fields; but Bomba, in her snug chamber beneath the beech-roots, slept untroubled through it all, carrying secure in her fertilized ovaries the heritage of the future of her race.

II

Not only was the snow all gone, but spring was firmly established in the land, before the growing warmth awakened Bomba, and she crept forth from her chamber to renew her acquaintance with the sun. Crocus and narcissus and polyanthus starred the brown garden beds; orange-gold dandelions made gay the young grass of the meadows, the willows along the meadow brook were all a cloud of creamy lemon catkins; and the grey old sugar-maple which overhung the garden wall had burst into a film of aerial rose.

It was, above all, the creamy fragrant willow blooms which attracted Bomba for the moment. She would revel among them in the noon-day glow, her heavy, booming note rising above the soft hum of the myriad lesser bees, and small wasps, and many-tinted flies which held riot in the scented pollen. But she was still drowsy; and every day, after gorging herself luxuriously, she would hurry back to her deep chamber under the

beech-roots, and sleep till the sun was once more nearing his height. But when spring forgot its caprices and melted into summer, she was seized with a new and imperious impulse, the impulse to found a colony and assume the sovereignty which she was born for. Her narrow cell grew distasteful to her, and she fell to searching the open, grassy slopes and bushy hillocks for more spacious quarters. After a long quest she found, in a steep and tangled fence-corner, just what she wanted. It was a forsaken burrow of the little, striped ground squirrel.

The burrow was roomy and dry, and the entrance to it was by a narrow tunnel about two feet long. The only fault Bomba could find with it was that it had a back door, another tunnel to afford its former occupants a means of exit in case of undesirable visitors. Bomba had no need of a back door, which meant draughts, so in cleaning up the nest she packed the litter into this entrance and pretty well stopped it up, intending to make it quite draught-proof later on, when she should find time to plaster it with leaf-bud gum and wax.

Meanwhile, in spite of her ceaseless activity, she was secreting thin morsels of wax from the scales of her under-body—a coarse, dark, yellowish wax, very unlike the delicate white secretion of the hive bees. This wax she presently scraped off and collected, kneaded it together, chewed it,

and tempered it with her saliva. Then, close beside the inner doorway of the nest she began to build what looked like a large, round, shallow cell, with extremely thin but amazingly tough walls. It was not an ordinary cell, however, but a honey pot, a temporary thing for holding day-by-day supplies; for Bomba knew that her business among the blossoms was liable to be interrupted at any moment by storm or rain, and she must have a store of food indoors, in order not to be delayed in her urgent task of home-building. Into this honey-pot, as soon as it was deep enough, she disgorged what was left of honey in her crop, and then bustled forth, impatient to begin her foraging for the new nest.

But for all her impatience, Bomba's first care, on emerging from the darkness of her tunnel, was to locate herself. She had had trouble enough to find the new home site. She was not going to let herself lose it. With her head towards the almost invisible entrance she rose on the wing and hovered slowly about, in ever-widening circles, for several minutes. Not until she had her directions fixed securely and every landmark noted did she swing away on her great business of gathering supplies.

Unlike her far-off cousin, the hive bee, who is so specialized, so automatic in all her actions, that she seems unable ever to think of more than one

thing at a time, Bomba could think of everything at once and seized upon opportunity as it came up. She was no purist in method. When the hive bee goes out to gather pollen, she quite ignores honey, she even ignores every kind of pollen except the one which she has started to collect; and when she has her mind set on honey, the most alluring display of pollen leaves her utterly uninterested. Bomba, on the other hand, was out for all she could get. If one blossom offered her honey, she accepted it eagerly, sucking it up and storing it in her honey sac. If the next flower had been already rifled of its nectar, but was rich in pollen, she would seize upon that with equal zest, and stuff it into the capacious pollen baskets on her thighs. Nor did she care what particular brand of pollen it might be. Red, orange, yellow, or creamy buff, it was all the same to her; so that her thighs were soon decorated with vivid, streaky protuberances of the precious spoil. As soon as she felt herself freighted, within and without, to her full capacity, she flew straight back to the nest, circled about the entrance to make sure of it, and then hurried in to unload. Her honey she disgorged into the honey-pot by the door; the pollen she stripped from her thighs and deposited on a smooth spot in the centre of the nest, treating it, as she did so, with a minute proportion of something of the nature of formic acid

from her own glands to keep it sweet. Then she hastened forth again for another load, and this fragrant toil engrossed her till nearly sunset, for she was intent on getting in as big a store as possible while daylight lasted.

But the fall of dusk, the coming out of the evening star—a sudden gleam of silver in the pure green-violet sky—meant no relaxation to the impatient Bomba. The poet sings to Hesperus as:

Star that bringest home the bee
And set'st the weary labourer free,

but it brought not Bomba home to rest, by any means. Of rest and sleep she had had enough already; and, to the work on which she was now feverishly bent, darkness was no hindrance. In the depth of the nest it was always dark; but all her senses were so subtly acute that this mattered not at all.

And now, kneading up a stiff paste of pollen moistened with honey, she proceeded to build a low, circular platform, or pedestal, of the mixture, in the centre of the floor. On this savoury foundation she modelled a spacious cell of wax. In the bottom of this cell she laid her first eggs, a baker's dozen of them, and then, sealing the top with a thin waxen film, she began to brood them, solicitously as a mother thrush. For four days she stuck to her task, only leaving it for brief intervals to

snatch a mouthful of honey; and then the eggs hatched out into a bunch of hungry grubs, which fell straightway to satisfying their hunger by devouring the pollen-paste floor on which they squirmed. Now Bomba's duties grew more exacting. She had to rush the work of gathering honey and pollen; for the little grubs in the cell grew swiftly and their appetites with them. She opened the waxen covering of the cell and pumped in continual rations of the nourishing paste. And between whiles she continued to brood the little family, that the warmth of her great velvety body might hasten their development. Soon they grew so big that the cell was crowded and they all had to stand up on their tails in order to find room, and in this position Bomba had to feed them individually, thrusting the food into each little greedy mouth in turn. In about seven days, however, they had reached full growth, and then their appetites all ceased simultaneously. Each spun itself a tough, perpendicular, silken-paper, yellow-brown cocoon, independent, but firmly attached to those of its neighbours—shut itself up in it, and went to sleep to await the great final change.

The group of cocoons, all stiffly erect and knitted together, now needing no longer their waxen envelope, Bomba stripped it off and used the precious wax to build other and smaller cells

encircling the base of the cocoon bundle. In each of these, as she completed it, at intervals of two and three days, she laid five or six more eggs and sealed them up to hatch. She also had to collect more and more honey, more and more pollen, and to build higher the walls of the great honey-pot beside the door as the nectared store increased. When not at any of these tasks she spent her time, not less arduously, in brooding the cocoons, stretching her furry black-and-yellow body to warm them all, like a sitting hen who has been given a bigger clutch than she can properly cover.

Within the nest these days were just one round of uneventful toil; but outside, upon her foraging expeditions among the flowers of field and garden, Bomba's life was not without its risks and its adventures. On account of her great size and strength, and the power of her long (though not very venomous) sting, she had fewer foes to dread than most of her lesser cousins; but, having the sole responsibility of the home, for the present, on her shoulders, she was bound to be careful, though by nature unsuspecting. The biggest and fiercest of northern spiders were of no concern to her, for none would venture within range of that darting flame, her sting, and she could wreck their toughest webs without an effort. But some of the bigger insect-eating birds were a peril against

which she had to be vigilant. And some of the hunting mice and shrews that infested the meadow were very dangerous, because they knew how to pounce upon her and seize her by the broad back, in such a way that her sting could not reach them. For the most part, however, the insect-hunters were inclined to leave her alone, respecting her almost as much as they did that most vicious and venomous fighter, the great black hornet.

On one of these mornings, while Bomba's first brood were yet in their cocoons, and Bomba was out on one of her hurried foragings, a prowling shrew-mouse stumbled upon the entrance of the nest. He was hungry, and the smell that came from the burrow was appetizing. He knew enough about the wild bee, however, to dampen any tendency to rashness. He stood motionless, and listened intently. Keen as were his ears, he could not detect a sound from within. There was no rustle of wings—no bustle of busy feet over the combs—no warning hum. He judged, rightly enough, that the colony was just being started, and that its queen and foundress was out gathering supplies. He decided to slip in, snatch a few mouthfuls of rich and satisfying brood-comb, and get away before the owner's return.

But he had miscalculated. Just as his tawny hind-quarters were disappearing into the burrow,

Bomba returned. Swooping downward like a flash of flame, she sank her long sting deep into the tender flesh between the marauder's thighs. The terrible weapon seared like fire. With a squeal of anguish the shrew doubled back convulsively, then sprang at his assailant. But Bomba was already out of reach, circling over him with a deep, angry hum, and obviously ready to strike again.

The shrew was courageous, but his courage failed him now. The pain of his wound was intolerable. He darted away in a panic, to hide himself under the grass and lick his wound till the anguish should be eased. And Bomba, never vindictive, was satisfied with her victory. She crept into the burrow in anxious haste to assure herself her treasure had not been tampered with.

On the eleventh day from the commencement of their chrysalis sleep the perfect workers began to break the tops of their cocoons and crawl forth, very frail, damp, and dishevelled. Bomba guided them all, by ones and twos, to the great honey-pot, where they slaked their hunger, then gathered them back to her cocoon couch to be warmed by her body and helped with their first, much needed toilets. For the next day or so she mothered them tenderly in the intervals of her other duties, —and the duty of keeping the honey-pot supplied, needless to say, was a heavy one. But by the end

of that time the youngsters had reached their full strength, and all her care was rewarded. She had now a dozen sturdy, sprightly, glossy young workers, less than half her size, but keen and diligent to share with her the swiftly multiplying labours of the nest. The youngsters eagerly buzzed forth to collect honey and pollen, and fell to mixing bee-bread, feeding the new batch of larvæ, constructing fresh brood-cells, and replenishing the big communal honey-pot, with the instinctive skill which was their heritage of a million generations. They also reinforced the tops of their old cocoons with wax, and turned these into storage cells that no precious space or labour should be wasted.

III

The colony being now fairly established, it grew with amazing speed. Every two or three days a new batch of eggs hatched out into hungry larvæ, a new detachment of velvety, black-and-yellow little workers emerged from their cocoons to swell the happy industry of the nest. To them all Bomba was both queen and mother. Her rule was absolute, unquestioned; but for all her royalty she, unlike the sequestered queen of the hive bees, took full share in all the tasks of the community; besides performing her own peculiar duty of

laying eggs. Now, however, she began to leave more of the dangerous outdoor work, the gathering of supplies, to her subjects, and spent more of her time in the homework of the nest. But she could not forget the lure of the sunshine or the riot of bloom which now clothed garden and meadow with colour. Once or twice a day she would go booming forth to levy toll of her favourite flowers.

One day, when she had her head buried deep in the fragrant calyx of a honeysuckle, the Lady of the Garden stood close by and watched her at her work. Presently the Lady put forth a slender finger and, very cautiously and delicately, stroked the black-and-gold velvet of Bomba's back. The touch was light as dandelion down, and conveyed no menace to Bomba's sensitive nerves. She gave a shrill little squeak of protest, and went on sucking up the honey with redoubled speed, probably thinking that the intruder was after a share of it. The Lady laughed, and drew back a step or two, still watching and wondering if the great bee was going to resent the liberty which had been taken with her. Nothing was further from Bomba's thought. She withdrew her head, having drained all the honey, and hummed over to the next blossom.

At this moment a hungry shrike,—a bird fitly known as “the butcher-bird,”—who had his

nest in a tree beyond the garden wall, swooped down and made a dash at the unsuspecting Bomba, just as she sank her head into the calyx. It was the moment of fate for her,—and consequently, for the little community at home in the burrow as well. But the Lady, quicker than thought, gave a sharp cry and struck at the audacious bird with her hand. The shrike, startled, missed his aim, merely brushed the blossom roughly with a wing tip, and flew up into the nearest tree. The Lady indignantly hurled a handful of gravel at him,—which, strangely enough, almost hit him,—and drove him from the garden. She hated him heartily, ever since she had discovered the thorn bush on whose spikes he impaled the butterflies, grasshoppers, and little birds who were his victims, when he had captured more than he could eat. As for Bomba, somewhat flustered by her narrow escape, she darted straight away to the safe shelter of the nest, without waiting to complete her honeyed load. For the nest was indeed a safe shelter now—with a hundred ready and fiery stings to guard it from all intruders.

By the time the hay was gathered in and the hot noons were growing drowsily shrill with the noise of the grasshoppers and cicadas, Bomba's swarm had grown powerful and her little citadel in the burrow nearly filled its earthen hiding-place. Though built apparently at haphazard, it was

now an elaborate structure, tier upon tier of coarse, irregular comb all centred about the original bunch of cocoons. Throughout it was traversed by galleries so spacious that even Bomba's bulky form could reach every cell comfortably,—the little workers building not only for their own puny stature but for hers. As to the character and contents of the cells there was rather a lack of system, but in general there was a tendency to keep the brood cells near the centre, surrounded by the pollen cells, for storing thick honey, and a few scattered honey-pots for thin, watery day-to-day supplies, towards the circumference. The great communal honey-pot beside the entrance had long ago been abandoned, and its waxen walls used up in new construction.

About this time, when the rich, heavy days were shortening and the ripeness of later summer had come upon the lazy air, Bomba, at the height of her prosperity, began to take thought for the future of her race. She, and she alone, had premonition of the bitter season that was to come. She began to lay two new kinds of eggs, one kind, in ordinary worker cells, to produce males or drones instead of workers, the other kind, laid in large cells, destined to hatch into big larvæ which should ultimately be transformed into great and splendid queens like herself.

With this change in her activities Bomba sud-

denly found herself strictly confined to the nest for a time. She was confronted by an entirely new and inexplicable anxiety. As soon as she began laying the drone and queen eggs some of the workers,—who were themselves all imperfectly developed females, and not without certain feminine instincts,—were seized with a strange fratricidal jealousy. From time to time they would make murderous raids upon these new kinds of eggs, seeking to tear them to pieces. Bomba angrily beat off all these attacks, but she dared not leave the nest even for the briefest turn in the sunshine. She had to be ceaselessly on guard, night and day. But as soon as the eggs were hatched the mothering instincts of the workers triumphed over their jealousy, and they began tending the new larvæ with all care. A few, their thwarted sex-instincts partially aroused, even began to emulate Bomba and laid some eggs for themselves. These eggs, however, never having been fertilized by a mating, were incapable of producing either workers or queens. All that hatched from them, for some inscrutable reason known only to Mother Nature herself, were small drones. These disappointed little females were doing their best in producing mates for others, though at no possible profit to themselves.

All these drones of Bomba's tribe, though scarcely larger than the workers, were fine, inde-

pendent, capable fellows, far superior to those greedy and lazy spongers the drones of the hive-bee. As soon as they were grown up they promptly left the nest, to forage for themselves and to seek amorous adventure through the last bright weeks of the fleeting summer. They were quite capable of looking after themselves, and it was not for them to loaf about at home and eat up the stores which others had collected.

Bomba's care was now all for her young queens, —who took much longer than the workers or the drones to reach maturity. Each as it came forth from its big cocoon she tended lovingly, and saw it at length fly forth, loaded with honey, never to return. By the time the last young queen had left the nest Bomba was visibly growing old. Worn with her labours, she was weary and bedraggled, and her velvety garb had a somewhat moth-eaten look. She laid a few more worker eggs; and then stopped, as there was no need of raising fresh young bees just to be killed by the autumn frosts. The colony now dwindled apace. Many of the workers, having no more young to tend at home, forsook the nest and revelled away their closing days among the late asters and zinnias and dahlias of the garden. Others, more indolent or more toil-worn, fell to eating up the stored honey in the cells, to crawl forth finally for a last, listless flight, and fall into the grass

when the worn-out little engine of their being came to a stop.

To Bomba the now almost deserted nest grew suddenly hateful. It was all the creation of her own tremendous energy and life-force, but she had no more use for it. The old fire flickered up again, though feebly, in her nerves. Once more, after all her toils, she would roam free. She crawled out into the glow of the afternoon sun and soared briskly over the garden wall,—turning her back upon the nest forever.

Drawn by the blaze of a bed of flame-coloured late nasturtiums she quite lost her head for half an hour or so, dipping into one gorgeous bloom after another, as if to make the most of the fleeting joy. But presently her elation flagged. She felt heavy with sleep, and clung to the blossom she was on as if she were dazed. Soon she lost her hold, and went fluttering to the ground. The air had suddenly turned cold. Too drowsy to fly she crawled in among the pale-green stalks, and nestled down there till she was almost hidden. It was an inadequate shelter, but to her it seemed sufficient for the moment. She would hunt up a better one when she again felt ready to fly. Soon she dropped to sleep. The sleep passed into a deep coma. The sun went down, and with twilight an invisible shroud of damp cold settled upon the garden. At its touch the last faint spark of

Bomba's life flickered out, painlessly. But she had lived to the full; and she left behind her a score of royal and fertile daughters, to carry on, when spring should come again, the ancient, fine traditions of her race.

A GENTLEMAN IN FEATHERS

I

THE tide was out, and the miles on miles of naked red mud flats shone like burnished copper beneath the flaming sunset. Along high-water mark, as far as the eye could see, ran an interminable line of dyke, fencing from the fury of the spring tides the vast pallid expanse of the marshes just filming with the light green of early spring. At one point the rampart of the dyke, following a crook in the low coastline, thrust the blunt apex of a spacious angle far out into the sheen of the mud-flats. In this corner, partly hidden by a tangle of dry brown mullein stalks, crouched a man with a gun, peering out across the flats and scanning the sky towards the southwest. Behind him, dotting the well-drained marsh with patches of shimmering light, stretched a chain of shallow, sedgy meres. In the centre of the nearest one a tall blue heron, motionless as if painted on a Japanese screen, stood watching and waiting to spear some unwary frog.

Steve Barron, owner of the little farm on the uplands half a mile back, and of the section of

marsh between his farm and the dyke, was lying in wait for the evening flight of the sea-ducks, who were accustomed to feed far out on the tides by day and fly in to rest at night on the sedgy meres. He was also not without hope of bagging a brant or a goose. For this was the season of the Northward Flight. That most noble and splendid of game-birds, the great Canada goose, was now winging up from his winter feeding grounds in the rank subtropical lagoons around the Gulf of Mexico to his desolate nesting-places among the uncharted, swampy lakes of the lone north. Last night, lying awake in his bed, Steve Barron had listened, with the thrill which that mysterious sound never failed to give him, to the faint, sonorous, pulsing voices, as flock after flock winnowed high overhead through the dark. In his imagination, in

That inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude,

he pictured them, in slender V-shaped array, driving their sure way straight north on tireless wings, high up in the vaulted night. Far off he would catch, first, a scarcely audible sound,—*honka-honk* wavering and dying away; then swiftly growing louder on the stillness, till passing overhead it became a loud and hollow, indescribably musical, throbbing of *honka-honka-honka-honka-honka*,—

each swift throb a wing-beat,—and in swift diminishing died away again into the viewless distance, leaving a silence strangely poignant until, after a waiting that stretched the ear, the approach of another flock was heralded.

Steve Barron's heart went out to those high-journeying voices, and journeyed with them. But being a lover of all the wild kindreds and an ardent student of their ways, he knew that not always did those migrant flocks do their travelling by night. Each flock, he knew, was guided and ruled by the wise old gander who cleft the air at the apex of the V. Sometimes, to break the long, long voyage and to rest the weaker members of the flock, he would decree a halt of a day and a night, or longer if advisable, at some secluded water on the way. Steve Barron knew that occasionally a flock had been known to stoop to that chain of sedgy pools that lay behind the angles of the dyke, out in the naked solitude of the marshes. Being woodsman and hunter as well as farmer, he had the quaint inconsistency of many of the finest hunters, who love the creatures whom they love to kill. He was eager to shoot one of these beautiful and wary travellers.

On this particular evening, whilst the sunset was flaring red across the coppery gleam of the flats, earth, sky and the far-off sea looked all equally empty of life. Not even the lightest breeze

stirred the brown mullein-tops about Steve Barron's hiding-place.

There being no immediate need of caution, Steve Barron stretched his legs, filled his pipe, and settled himself for a smoke. But soon, as the sun sank below the horizon, and the blaze of rose and orange faded down, the spacious solitude began to come to life. Far up in the paling zenith a solitary duck winged inland. A little lower two foraging night-hawks swooped, with a long musical, twanging note as of a smitten harpstring. A flock of tiny sandpipers flickered up the mud-flats, whirled, with a sudden flash of white breasts, as they approached the dyke, and settled into invisibility a couple of hundred yards away. Steve Barron reluctantly put away his pipe and drew closer into his screen.

Then five slim "yellow-legs," who had been feeding on the mud along the lip of the receding tide, came flying homeward. They flew low, rose at the dyke, and passed straight over Barron's head, but never noticed him because he lay so still. Had he moved so much as a finger their keen bright eyes would have detected him, and they would have whirled off in alarm. But they sailed down close to the surface of one of the pools, dropped their long legs which had been stretched out behind them, hung poised for a second on arched, motionless wings, and alighted where the

water was about an inch or so deep. Here they ran about, and piped to one another mellowly, happy and secure. Steve Barron was well content to leave them so. He was after bigger game than yellow-legs. And he knew that the sight of these wary birds feeding undisturbed would be a sign to all other eyes that there was no danger near.

Next there came into view two big ducks,—“whistlers,” as Barron’s practical eyes made them out to be,—flying high and straight and at tremendous speed. These were worthy game; and Steve slipped the gun to his shoulder, stealthily. The ducks were heading to pass over a little to the left to his hiding-place,—a fair shot, though a long one. He was just about to fire when his finger stiffened ere it pressed the trigger. His keen ears had caught, faint and elusive on the still evening air that far-off *honka-honka-honka* of the great geese. A loud, urgent whistling of sturdy wings thrilled him for a moment, and the two ducks sped by, unsuspecting, and settled, with a sharp splash, on one of the farther and deeper pools.

Steve Barron drew a breath of relief because he had checked himself in time. A moment later the geese came into view,—a thin, black *V*, one leg as long again as the other, heading straight for the point of the dyke. They were flying high;

but presently they started downwards on a long slant and with a throb of exaltation he realized that they were planning to alight on one of the deep pools half a mile behind him. His chance had come, and his nerves steadied. The wild pulsing music of that *honka-honka-honka-honka-honka* swept near and grew louder with the swiftness of a lightning express. The muzzle of Barron's long duck-gun covered the apex of the *V* and followed it up, as he waited for the flock to come within range.

But much as Barron knew of the wild creatures, he did not know the expert wariness, the amazing keenness of vision, of the experienced gander who led that flock and had guided it through many perils. That wise bird was not unduly impressed by the sight of the bunch of yellow-legs feeding placidly in the shallows. He distrusted all sagacity but his own. He had his eye on that patch of dead mullein stalks, as something that *might* conceal a foe. And presently he detected the almost imperceptible movement of Barron's gun. A sharp note of warning came into his cry, and he slanted upwards again abruptly, at the same time swerving off to the right with a leap into redoubled speed. And the whole *V* swung with him in instant response, each bird stretching its long neck to a bar of steel under the sudden fierce urge.

Barron snapped an oath of disappointment and, though the range was hopeless, discharged both barrels in swiftest succession. He had not allowed for the sudden change of speed in his quarry; and so it was more by good luck than good shooting that one heavy pellet found its mark. It caught the hindermost bird of the flock, a young, unmated gander, in the wing. He shot far forwards with tremendous impetus of his flight, turned over and over, and pitched, with a mighty splash, into the centre of the nearest pool. The yellow-legs scattered off with shrill pipings of alarm; and the two ducks on the pool half a mile away, flapped up, squawking indignantly, and flew off to safer waters.

With a whoop of triumph Steve Barron dropped his gun and dashed into the pool to secure his prize. This pool was nowhere more than a foot deep,—in most parts not more than two or three inches. The wounded bird could not escape by diving. Only here and there could he swim; and at running he was no adept in any case. Overtaken in half a minute he turned valiantly at bay. With harsh, vicious hissing, and savage dartings of his long snaky neck, he jabbed at his adversary's legs,—and his iron-hard bill brought blood, even through the thick homespun trousers, at every twisting snap. At the same time he pounded heavily with his one uninjured wing. But Barron

was too elated to care for his bitten legs. This was better luck than he had ever dared to hope for,—a prize indeed to adorn his barn-yard. The more fiercely the splendid bird fought, the better Barron loved him. He grabbed the buffeting wing and held it helpless. He caught the darting neck in a firm but tender grip, just behind the head. He lugged the unsubdued, still struggling captive ashore, held him down between his knees; and, after much difficulty, with both hands bleeding from savage bites, managed to get him securely bundled up in his coat, knotting the bundle with the coat sleeves and with the stout string which a woodsman always carries in his pocket. Then, having picked up his gun, he tucked the precious bundle under his arm, tail foremost, and set off exultant on the long tramp back to his farm. He had a good reason for carrying his prize tail foremost. He had, of course, been unable to truss up his captive's head; and the outraged bird, undaunted by the ignominious position in which it found itself, was biting vindictively wherever it could reach. But the seat of Steve Barron's trousers was of double thickness, for the sake of durability, and proof against the utmost that furious darting, twisting bill could do. At each indignant assault Barron chuckled appreciatively, thinking how his indomitable captive would lord it over the barn-yard.

II

At first, until his wing was healed, the great gander was kept solitary in a lighted shed, where he could see none of the other denizens of the farm-yard. He was a magnificent specimen of his noble breed, the aristocrats of their race. Taller and of far more graceful lines than other geese, he had a glossy black neck that was swanlike in its length and slenderness. The jet black of his head and bill was set off vividly by a crescent-shaped half collar of pure white under the throat, extending from eye to eye. His back and wings were of a warm greyish brown, each feather edged with a lighter shade. His breast was grey, fading softly into white on the belly and thighs; while his tail and his strong webbed feet, again, were inky black.

The stately captive soon grew tame enough under his master's feeding and gentle handling, but kept always a severe and dignified aloofness, as far removed from fear as from familiarity. He learned to recognize his name of "Michael," and would condescend to feed from his master's hand; but any attempt to caress him was always rebuffed with a warning hiss, and a flash of his dark, brilliant eyes. At length Steve Barron clipped the long flight-feathers of the wounded wing, turned him out into the barn-yard, and watched with boy-

ish curiosity to see how he would conduct himself.

The moment he realized he was free, Michael spread his wings, took a long run, and flapped mightily, striving to rise into the air, while the ducks quacked and the hens squawked and cackled at the strange intruder upon their peace. But instead of flying, as he expected to do, Michael merely sprang into the air about three feet, and fell over heavily upon his side. It was a blow to both his hopes and his dignity. Swift to learn his lesson he made no second attempt, but stood for a moment staring about him, and then moved slowly towards the puddle of water beside the horse-trough, where the ducks were congregated. The ducks, gabbling excitedly, made way for him with great respect; but the farm-yard cock, a big, pugnacious cross-bred wyandotte, resenting his lofty air, dashed at him furiously. This attack was met with a hiss so loud and strident, so full of menace, that the cock was startled out of his arrogance. He checked his rush abruptly, eyed his intended victim with keen appraisal, and stalked off to tell his flock that the stranger was not worth bothering about. He flew up on the woodpile, crowed a shrill challenge, and then, seeing that the challenge went unanswered, flew down again and fell to scratching in the litter. Thenceforth he ignored the stranger as completely as

the stranger ignored him, and felt quite assured that his honour was satisfied. This little by-play amused Barron, to whom all the creatures on the farm were individuals, and individually interesting.

After guttering in the puddle for a few seconds with his strong black bill Michael stretched himself to his full height, scanned the sky overhead, and gave a long, resonant call of *honka-honka-honka-honka-honka-honka-honk*. Then he listened intently, as if expecting an answer out of the blue.

In a second or two an answer came; but not such a one as he expected, and neither did it come from the sky. From behind the cow-shed at the further end of the farm-yard, waddling hurriedly, appeared a big white gander, followed by three geese, two of whom were pied grey-and-white, while the third was clear grey, and somewhat slenderer in build than her companions. In that long call of Michael's, for all its strangeness and its wildness, the white gander had recognized something of kinship, and at the same time something of challenge to his supremacy. When he saw the tall, dark form of the stranger, erect and watchful beside the watering-trough, he gave vent to a harsh scream of defiance and rushed forwards, with uplifted wings and with open bill, to chase the intruder from his premises.

Recognizing the white gander as, in a way, one of his own kind, Michael eyed him, for a second

or two, with an interest that was inclined to be friendly. Then, seeing that the gander was anything but friendly, anger surged up in his lonely heart. Lowering his long, black, snake-like neck, stretching it out parallel with the ground, and waving it from side to side with a peculiarly menacing movement, he hissed like a whole nestful of copperheads and advanced to meet the unprovoked attack.

The two great birds came together with a thud, amid a storm of wild hissings and a desperate buffeting of wings. The white gander had somewhat the advantage in more weight, but he had none of Michael's lightning swiftness, and his strength was no match for the corded and seasoned muscles opposed to him. In a duel with one of his own tribe Michael would have fought warily, sparring for an advantage before coming to grips. But in this encounter he had been rushed, and the fight was at close quarters on the instant. Before he had time to realize his mistake the white gander was hopelessly beaten. Seizing him by the upper wing-joint Michael shook him off his balance, bore him over on his back, trod him down and smothered him with wing-strokes, and then grabbed him, like a bulldog, by the throat, to settle the matter once for all.

But at this moment just in time to save the white gander's life, Steve Barron sprang to the rescue.

He dragged the furious Michael off,—getting well bitten in the process,—and hurled him aside. Then he snatched up the bedraggled and choking gander, and deposited him in the shed from which his conqueror had so lately been released. Michael shook himself vigorously, gave utterance to a single ringing *honka-honk* of triumph, and proceeded calmly to preen his feathers, which had been ruffled less by the fight than by Steve Barron's rude interference.

What specially concerned Barron now was the attitude which the victorious Michael would take towards the three geese. He had heard, or read, somewhere, that the wild goose, unlike his domesticated cousin, was rigidly monogamous. He hoped it was not so, for he wanted to establish Michael in the dethroned white gander's place, as lord of the harem, and rear a new breed of geese that should eclipse anything in all the country-side. But he must wait and learn Michael's intentions before sending the white gander into exile.

Presently the two pied geese, regarding the dark and stately conqueror with high approval, came waddling up to make his acquaintance and tell him how wonderful he was. This they did by ducking their heads with a queer little jerky movement, unmistakably conciliatory. The grey goose followed them with head erect, curious but indifferent. She had been the favourite of the white

gander, and though she certainly admired his vanquisher she had a high opinion of her own value.

As the geese approached, Michael drew himself to his full height and regarded them intently. They did not please him at all. They were too much like his late antagonist. But they were females, so his breeding forbade him to attack them. He turned, and stalked away haughtily. The two pied geese followed, still ducking their heads and gabbling softly in their throats. The grey, on the other hand, stopped abruptly, and cocked her head to examine the sky, as if interested in nothing but the weather prospects. Then she strolled across to the other side of the farmyard and fell to feeding on a patch of tender young grass.

Half around the yard moved, slowly and solemnly, the procession of Michael and the two pied geese,—Michael with lofty head in air, pointedly unconscious of the pursuit, his enamoured followers waddling and bobbing hopefully a couple of yards behind his arrogant tail. They passed close by Steve Barron, who stifled his laughter lest he should disturb the drama. They passed the grey goose, who went on feeding with apparent unconcern,—and who, perhaps on that very account, attracted a piercing glance of interest from Michael's haughty eye. Then the two wooers, gaining confidence, closed up. His patience and his

politeness alike exhausted, Michael turned sharply and ran at them with a hiss of indignant protest. His unwelcome pursuers, suddenly alarmed, scurried away; and Michael found himself beside the grey goose, who ignored him and went on feeding. But Barron noticed that she merely went through the form of feeding, biting at the grass and letting it drop from her bill.

Now the wanderer from the south was unmated, and very lonely. The grey goose, though so unlike the females of his own race, was graceful and attractive. He desired her. Ducking his proud head he stepped close to her side, murmuring musically in his throat, and pretended to pick a morsel of the grass just where she was biting at it. The grey goose was flattered. She had noted with complaisance the rebuff of her two sisters. Her heart went out to the stately stranger. Her aloofness melted, and she lightly brushed his arched black neck with her bill. For a few moments the two gabbled together in intimate undertones, and then, having come to an understanding, went off side by side towards the goose-pond, in the meadow behind the barn, the grey goose obviously guiding her new lover.

The two pied geese, seeing that their sister had broken down the splendid stranger's reserve, took heart again and waddled excitedly in pursuit, never doubting that they would be allowed to

share his favour. But they were speedily disillusioned. Michael turned upon them with a warning hiss which they could not misunderstand. They wandered back disconsolately towards the horse-trough and lifted their voices in an appeal for their vanquished lord. The white gander answered from his prison. Then Steve Barron let them in to share his safe captivity for the night, that the situation might have time to settle down in its new adjustment. When he let them out, the following morning, the white gander, his spirits quite revived, led off at once to the familiar goose-pond. But when he caught sight of Michael and the grey goose, contentedly preening their feathers at the edge of the pond, he accepted the new order with resignation. He conducted his diminished harem to another pond, a couple of hundred yards away. And Steve Barron concluded,—as the event proved rightly,—that there would be no more fighting.

III

Thenceforth the two establishments kept widely apart. Michael was not aggressive, so long as he was allowed to mind his own business; and as for the white gander, he had learned his lesson well. He would run no risk of a second humiliation. But the grey goose found herself obliged to learn a number of things. Michael

was a most devoted and tender lover, but a jealous one; and he insisted on her living up to his ideals. There was no more loafing about the barn-yard for her. Michael chose a little rushy point, jutting out into the goose-pond, for their abode; and observing this, Steve Barron gave them a feed-trough close to the water's edge. As a protection against skunks, foxes and other night marauders, the geese were always shut up in a pen in the yard at night; but Barron surmised that any prowler who interfered with Michael's establishment would get a rude surprise.

The domestic geese had a slack habit of dropping their first eggs of the season wherever they happened to be at the critical moment,—whether in the middle of the barn-yard, out in the meadow, or even in the mud of the pond. As their laying time was early morning, Barron saved the eggs by not letting the careless mothers out till after breakfast. But the grey goose was not allowed any such slackness. As soon as Michael perceived that she would presently begin to lay, he persuaded her to arrange a rude nest, of dead rushes and dry grass, in the centre of the reedy point. He helped her to construct it; and he insisted on her laying her first egg in it. After that he had no more trouble with her, for she became as interested in her domestic duties as he was himself. Instincts of her remote wild ancestry awakened within her, and she grew almost as fierce as

Michael himself when Steve Barron came, as he did daily, to see how the home on the rushy point was getting on. At first he never got away from his inspection without bitten legs and buffeted knees. But at length Michael, with his high intelligence, came to recognize that the tall being whom he could neither hurt nor terrify was altogether friendly, however unwelcome, and ceased to greet him with anything worse than a monitory hiss.

When there were six big white eggs in the nest (a mate of Michael's own kind would have laid only four, or possibly five, and these would have been of a creamy buff in colour), the happy grey goose began to sit. Now Michael grew more savage in his guardianship; and Steve Barron, well content, refrained from tormenting the pair with his attentions, only visiting the pond each morning to put fresh feed in the trough. On one of these morning visits he found near the edge of the pond the drowned body of a big weasel. The weasel had made the mistake of thinking the guardian of the nest an ordinary gander. Michael had caught him by the back of the neck, with the tenacity of a bulldog, and held him under water till his many murderous crimes were expiated. Barron sometimes wondered how a fox would fare in a fight with his redoubtable favourite. But, perhaps fortunately for Michael, the foxes of that neighbourhood were too wary to venture so near the farm-yard. They had no mind to invite the

vengeance of that omnipotent being, the Man with a Gun.

After about a month of devoted brooding the grey goose led down into the water six particularly sturdy and lively goslings. They were darker in colour than ordinary goslings, and had black bills and feet like their splendid sire. But as they grew up, and their baby down gave place to grown-up feathers, they were more like their mother than their father, except that their tail, heads and faces were greyish black. They all lacked the broad conspicuous crescent of pure white across the throat which added so much to the distinction of Michael's appearance. Their backs and wings were of a solid dark grey, with none of the rich chocolate colouring of their father. Moreover they all proved to be most sociable and domesticated in their tastes, with a distinct inclination to fraternize with the youngsters of the white gander's rival flock. So it came about that before the end of the summer, when they were nearly full-grown, Michael and the grey goose, quite satisfied with each other's society, chased them away altogether and once more had the goose-pond to themselves. Absorbed in each other, they were not at all troubled that the white gander now led their own offspring in his train. All they demanded was that the garrulous flock should give a wide berth to the goose-pond.

At last came autumn, and the time of the

Southward Flight. With the autumn moult, of course, Michael renewed the flight feathers of his clipped wing. Steve Barron purposely refrained from clipping them again, because, being a naturalist at heart, he wanted to find out what Michael would do. Which would triumph in that wild heart, the call of his kind and the migratory urge, or his devotion to his mate?

When the days grew short and grey, and bleak winds swept the little upland farm, and ice, in the crisp mornings, fringed the muddy edges of the goose-pond, and far away across the faded marshes the stormy tides of autumn roared and pounded at the dyke-barrier, then in Michael's heart stirred memories of the warm blue lagoons and sun-steeped reed-beds of the south. When the first southward-bound flock of his kindred passed high overhead, and their hollow honking throbbed downward to his ears, Michael stretched himself erect, with waving wings, and answered the alluring voices with a long cry of *honka-honka-honka-honka*, repeating it at brief intervals till the journeying *V* was out of sight and hearing. The grey goose, not understanding at all, but vaguely apprehensive, cocked her eyes skyward, and then added her own shrill clamour to her mate's sonorous appeal.

When all was quiet again Michael gabbled to her anxiously, striving to fire her blood with his

own restlessness. But in vain. The grey goose would do anything in her power to please him, but she could not help being content with her well-loved home. In her heart she felt no urge to wandering, in her unpractised wings no power of prolonged flight. But she did her best to be sympathetic, flapping her wings and clamouring to the skies whenever Michael indulged in that incomprehensible exercise. And from this Michael, not unnaturally, concluded that she, too, was longing for the south and ready to go with him. He could not conceive of any obstacle to the fulfillment of his dreams. They would spend a care-free winter on the palm-fringed lagoons and wild-rice beds and then, of course,—since all the geese, wild and tame alike, are home-lovers,—return with spring to their old nest beside the goose-pond.

It was not, however, until after several days of this restlessness and longing that the flight-fever in Michael's veins reached the point when it could no longer be resisted. It was a bright, sharp morning, with that edge to the air which spurs the spirit to adventure. Over the wooded ridge behind the farm appeared a long *V* of migrants, flying rather low and filling the sky with their poignant music. Michael sent forth one joyous *honka-honka*, to tell them he was coming, took a sharp run with wings flapping violently, sprang into the air, and went beating upwards on a long

slant calculated to join the flock at a point perhaps half a mile or more away, far out over the marshes. He never doubted that his faithful mate would follow him.

This, indeed, after a moment of agonized hesitation, she did, but only by a desperate effort. Michael, glancing back to assure himself, saw her flapping valiantly about thirty yards behind him, and sped onward and upward, his heart throbbing with exultation.

The grey goose had never flown more than two or three hundred yards, at the utmost. She had never been more than twenty feet above her familiar green earth. Now, after a few seconds' frantic pursuit of her lord, she found herself winging high above the tops of the tallest fir-trees. She was terrified. But she forgot that terror in a greater one, when she saw that Michael was leaving her far behind. Giving up the vain attempt to mount to his height, she flapped on desperately below him, in a level flight, driving her poor wings, more by will and nerve than muscular strength, to an effort which they were never intended for. She tried to call, hoping that Michael would relent and come back to her. But no sound came from her gaping bill and gasping throat. She was by this time well out over the marshes. At last, her overtaxed muscles would no longer obey her will. Still flapping, but ever

more and more feebly, she sank lower and lower, and came down with a loud splash in the shallows of a marshy pool. For perhaps half a dozen seconds she sat there dazed. Then, finding her voice again, she screamed beneath the loved form that flew so far and high above her.

Michael was by this time very near the flock. But through the whistling of his wings that scream reached his ear. He looked back. His strong flight slackened as he saw that his mate was not following him. He looked down, far down,—and descried her staggering and flapping painfully over the harsh stubble of the marsh. Just for two or three wing-beats he hesitated, staring wistfully after the flock. Then, with their joyous music ringing through every fibre, he turned aside, and sank down in wide spirals from his free heights and coloured dreams to rejoin his earth-bound mate. As he observed her pitiful exhaustion the realization came to him that the power of flight was not hers, but that she had done her desperate best to follow him. Rather than forsake her he would forget the blue lagoons and the golden-green reed-beds.

Very slowly and painfully, but with happiness in her heart, the grey goose led him back, across the rough marsh and up the rocky hill, to the dear, familiar pond behind Steve Barron's barn.

THE CAVE OF THE BEAR

I

BELOW a sharp ledge of grey and black rock, swept naked by the winds, the drifted snow fell away in a steep slope, and then rounded off into the aching whiteness of the levels. The pale sun glared icily from the whitish sky, calling forth here and there a thin and steel-sharp glint of bitter radiance upon the dead-white immensity of the snow. The wind, which for weeks had scourged the frozen world, had fallen to the stillness of death; and now, in the grip of the immeasurable cold, the gaunt, solitary fir-trees, towering darkly at wide intervals above the waste, cracked like rifle-shots under the fierce tension of their fibres.

But in the cave beneath the ledge it was not cold. Through the curtain of drifted snow, seven or eight feet in thickness, which covered the narrow entrance, the bitterness of the frost could not penetrate. The snow-curtain was supported by the feathery branches of a young fir sapling, which kept the snow firmly in place yet so light and full of air-spaces that its soft shield was a

more potent barrier than turf or stone against the savagery of the outer cold.

In the faintly glimmering darkness of the cave there was a musky, vital odour, with vague wafts of warmish air as if some great animal were breathing very slowly in its sleep. Now and again there would be a little drowsy whimper, as of deep content, or an almost imperceptible sound of furry snuggling and suckling unutterably comfortable; and in response there would come a faint stir, with two or three loud breaths from mighty lungs half minded to wake up. The air of the cave would be warmer for a moment, and the vital smell more pungent. Then all would sink again into sleep and silence—but a sleep and silence how unlike that stillness of death that reigned in the Great Frost outside the cave!

II

If Bob McLaggan had not had a will of tempered steel, if his heart had not been as stout as his muscles were enduring, he would, hours back, have given up the hopeless struggle and sunk down into the snow to his final sleep. And in the following summer, perhaps, some migrant Indian or trapper would have come upon his bones, picked clean by minks and foxes. Not born to the backwoods, and presuming too far upon his

strength and his acquired woodcraft, he had needlessly challenged the Wilderness in its most implacable mood, and the challenge had been vindictively accepted. Just at that time when the northern winter is often at its deadliest, before yielding to the approach of spring, he had set out from Gilson's Camp, on his snow-shoes, to cut across the Height of Land to Burnt Brook Settlement. This, at best, was a ten hours' tramp; but he was an expert on the snow-shoes, and well seasoned to cold and fatigue. Moreover, having hunted all through that region the previous autumn, he flattered himself that he knew the way as well as any native.

McLaggan journeyed light. He carried with him his sporting rifle, a .303, which suited him for any game from a partridge to a bull-moose. At his belt was slung a little tin kettle, that he might melt snow and refresh himself with hot tea on his journey. And in the haversack on his back, along with a change of raiment, went a loaf of camp bread and a generous "chunk" of cold boiled pork. The rest of his belongings at the camp he left behind him, to be carried by the first team which should be sent in to the settlement.

McLaggan set out in high spirits eager for a taste of civilization after months of the Wilderness winter. He thought of the homely houses of the little, straggling backwoods settlement, of the

leisurely train which would come hooting and pounding along, the following day, to pick him up at the bleak station and carry him back to the city. As he swung, with the long, loose shambling strides of the skilled snow-shoer, over the well-packed surface of the snow, his head was filled with visions of theatre and dance and smiling, white-armed girls. At this so long perspective, all women looked wonderful to him. In spite of the intense cold—unheeded degrees below zero—he was all aglow with vigour and anticipation, and the swift red blood raced in his veins under the stimulus of the keen and biting air.

He had started from the camp before dawn. The sunrise, pale and iridescent like mother-of-pearl, had found him at the foot of the long, gradual slope which led up to the Height of Land. All morning he had breasted the rise with gay resolution. Toward noon, assured that more than half of his journey lay well behind him, he halted in a little open space surrounded by dense, snow-sheathed fir-trees, and built himself a fire in the snow. Being a good woodsman, he built a small, handy, intimate fire that was convenient for the boiling of his tea-kettle and comfortable to sit by while he smoked and rested after his lunch. He allowed himself a full hour for this noon halt, and enjoyed every minute of it, outstretched luxuriously upon an armful of scattered

spruce-branches. Then he buried the fire in snow, slipped his moccasined feet into the moose-hide thongs of his snow-shoes, and blithely resumed his march.

By this time he had come out upon the high and comparatively level, though broken, plateau which crowned the Height of Land. There was now no more ascent to climb, and the snow had been packed harder by the winds, so he travelled more swiftly. But two or three times in the course of the afternoon he felt a momentary hesitation as to his path. Such scanty landmarks as had been familiar to him in the autumn were now hardly recognizable under their deep muffings of snow. The sky had thickened till the sun was no more visible as a guide, and the soft, pearly, diffused light made all things look alike to him. But he felt so sure of his general direction, so confident in his woods-instinct, that it never occurred to him to verify his course.

And then, when the pearly light was just beginning to take on a greyer, more forbidding tinge, when he was just beginning to expect the levels to fall away before him and open up a view of the wide Valley of Burnt Brook, he got a shock which brought him up in the middle of his eager stride. He ran upon a solitary snow-shoe track!

It was his own! He knew, beyond a question,

the pattern of it. His snow-shoes were of a shape used only by an Indian tribe of the far Northwest.

McLaggan was startled and humiliated. His woodcraft had failed him grossly. He took out his pipe, filled and lit it defiantly, and then studied his surroundings. Yes, he remembered those three tall spruces on the right, too gaunt to carry any cloak of snow. He had passed them about the middle of the afternoon. He was good and lost. "A pretty damn fool!" he laughed bitterly. Of course, he could retrace his tracks back to the camp—the only sensible thing to do! But then, the shame of it! The mockery that would greet him! And the night would be dark, for there was no moon, and the sky was overcast. There would be only the misleading, ghostly glimmer of the snow to find his way by. Further, in his confidence he had indulged his cheery appetite and consumed every scrap of his supplies for lunch. And in that devouring cold he was already fiercely hungry. There was nothing for it but to make camp for the night, keep up a good fire, and console himself with his pipe. With the first of the morning light he would strike onward again for the settlement; and this time he would be more careful of his direction.

Having no cutting implement with him but his heavy hunting knife, McLaggan's first care was

a supply of firewood, chiefly dead branches, before the daylight should fail him; and with the knife he hacked down a few birch saplings, to mix with the dry wood and make his fire last longer. Then, using one of his snow-shoes as a shovel, he dug in the snow a trench about four feet deep, three feet wide, and seven or eight feet long. In one end of this trench he deposited an armful of green spruce branches to rest upon. At the other end he started his frugal fire.

In spite of the cold, which by now, with night-fall, had sunk down upon the voiceless world with redoubled intensity, there in the narrow depths of his trench McLaggan was almost warm. But hungry and exhausted as he was, he did not dare to lie down and sleep, lest in his sleep the fire should go out, the awful cold creep in upon him unawares, and his sleep change into death. Hunched over the fire he smoked and endlessly smoked, and in his mind retraced the steps of his journey, trying to decide at what point he had gone astray. At times he would turn his attention to cutting up the green birch sticks into handy lengths for his fire. Or he would vary the programme and cheat his craving appetite by melting some snow in his little kettle and making himself a weak but faintly aromatic tea of the birch twigs. And once in a while, when the deathly stillness seemed to close in too overwhelmingly upon his

lonely refuge, he suddenly set up a rollicking song. But this would presently come to seem as if it were stirring some slow, vast, implacable resentment in the heart of the terrible solitude; and he would stop abruptly, feeling as if he ought to apologize, and stir his little fire to a livelier blaze. The fire—it was his one friend; and they two were alone together in an infinite loneliness.

And so the long night wore itself away.

With the first of dawn McLaggan sprang up, shook himself, and tightened his belt. He drank some more of his insipid—but at least hot—birch tea. Then piling the last of the wood on the fire, he proceeded to warm himself systematically through and through. But he had to acknowledge to himself, ruefully, that though food could give warmth, warmth was a poor substitute for breakfast. A few minutes later he was under way, and heading, not back toward camp, but, in his obstinacy, for the settlement.

During the night, in thinking over the lay of the land, he had decided just where he had gone wrong. For about an hour he followed his trail of the preceding afternoon. By this time he had reached a space of broken ground, covered with rounded humps, which his old trail skirted on the left. He had taken these humps for thick clumps of bush buried in snow. He now realized that they were a colony of scattered boulders. He re-

remembered them from the autumn, and knew at once where he was. Burnt Brook Valley was not more than a dozen miles ahead. His heart jumped with relief and exultation. He skirted the broken ground on the right, instead of the left, and broke into the long, loose, shambling trot of the Indian snow-shoe runner. He would be at the settlement before noon—and he thought no more of girls and dances, but of buckwheat cakes and bacon.

In this mood he hurried forward for perhaps a half hour; and then, without warning, the jealous Powers of the Wilderness, coldly mocking his over-confidence, touched him, and tripped him up. What looked like a firm level of the snow was but the mask of a pit between two rocks, a pit half filled with juniper bushes and débris and old logs. The spreading tops of the juniper held up the snow, like a roof. The moment McLaggan planted a foot upon it, it gave way, and through he went—head and shoulders and one foot first, while the other foot, in its snow-shoe, kicked ignominiously on top of the hole.

Scratched, torn, and wrenched though he was by the headlong plunge, McLaggan's predominant feeling was that of being choked and smothered. Blindly fumbling, he released his foot from the thongs of the snow-shoe. Then he crawled forth, drew a deep breath, brushed the snow and broken

twigs from his eyes and mouth, and stretched his arms and legs to assure himself that there were no bones broken. In his relief at finding himself uninjured—for a few bruises and scratches were nothing—he laughed aloud. But as his eyes fell upon his snow-shoes, half buried in the snow, the laughter died on his lips. The wooden framework of one shoe was smashed hopelessly.

The realization of what that meant to him went through his heart with a stab. Without snow-shoes to carry him over the soft surface, the seven or eight miles of five-foot-deep snow which separated him from safety would be for him, without food and in that overwhelming cold, a barrier not to be passed unless by a miracle. That cold was eating up his reserves of vital warmth and strength with the greed of a wolf-pack. Already he felt it creeping into his bones. A wave of exhaustion swept over him. He shook it off savagely, and picked up the broken snow-shoe. His whole weight had come down upon it in the fall, jamming it through some interstice between the logs at the bottom of the hole, and buckling the framework both length-wise and across. The wreck was complete, and under the circumstances final. In the warmth of the camp, with plenty of stout cord and strips of strong wood, he could have mended it in a few hours. But here, and in this temperature! What was the use of thinking about it?

Already he felt the cold benumbing his wits, so he took his bearings and set out once more. He would, at least, keep going to the last gasp. His knapsack he threw away, a now useless burden in the struggle for life. But the snow-shoes he clung to, with a fleeting notion that he might yet do something with them. A mere feather-weight, he slung them on his back in place of the discarded knapsack. But his rifle, carefully cleared of snow, he carried ready for use. It might provide the miracle that was needed to pull him through. For it was food, and food alone, that could save him.

The snow, except in scant patches where it had drifted thin, lay everywhere from four to five feet deep. At every step McLaggan sank, sometimes only to the knee, more often to the thigh, to the waist. He did not walk, he floundered. At first he could keep straight on for several hundred yards before he would have to pause for breath. The exertion, calling into play every muscle of his body, soon warmed him, but he knew this inner warmth, with nothing to feed it, was only the more quickly exhausting him. He prudently moderated his exertions. He half closed his eyes; he banished all thoughts; he concentrated his will upon economizing every ounce of energy in muscle, nerve, or brain—in brain above all, for there, he knew, lay the springs of his will and his vitality. Nevertheless, within less than an hour he found

that his enforced halts for rest were growing more and more frequent. A deadly exhaustion was beginning to clutch at him. If only he could get a mouthful of food he could keep it at bay. At every halt he opened his eyes wide and peered eagerly about him, in the hope of glimpsing some winter prowler whom he could shoot. But the wilderness was lifeless. Not even a rabbit-track could he see anywhere upon the stainless levels of the snow. And if there were no rabbits abroad, there was small likelihood of any others of the wild kindred, all hunters of rabbits, crossing his desperate path.

For another hour McLaggan laboured on, his progress growing ever slower and slower. Then he began to lose count and care of time. He would allow himself to think only of keeping his direction and conserving his vital force. Through his half-closed lids he began to see curious coloured lights, and the scattered fir trees under their loads of snow would from time to time seem to stagger grotesquely, then recover themselves and stand erect again with the rigid air of a drunken man who protests he is not drunk. McLaggan found himself laughing foolishly at the action of the trees, and assuring himself that if they had really staggered they must have shed their snow. Then his watchful will prodded his brain sharply to attention; and, thoroughly startled to observe how

his wits had wandered, he pulled himself together with renewed resolution. A critical glance at his back tracks, however, showed him that it was his wits only, and not his feet, that had wavered. He gathered a handful of bud-tips from a birch sapling, chewed them vigorously, and floundered forward with the feeling of having made a fresh start.

In response to the spur of his will McLaggan kept going for another hour. But now, under the persistent sapping of his energy by the intense cold, the violence of his exertion was no longer keeping up his internal warmth. He began to persuade himself that it would be best to find a sheltered spot, build a fire, warm himself, and rest. His saner self, however, reminded him angrily that as he had nothing to eat he would only grow weaker and weaker beside his fire till he could no longer gather wood for it, and would then lie down to death beside its ashes. Time, as well as all else in the world, he told himself bitterly, was against him. Well, he would not yield. He would not meet Fate lying down. He would fall fighting, if fall he must.

At this point McLaggan hardly had life enough left to see where he was going. He found himself suddenly confronted by a high ledge of grey and black rock, its steep front shrouded to half its height with snow. Again he had lost his way.

The shock revived him for a moment. His eyes opened wide. He braced back his shoulders. He would climb the ledge; and perhaps from that post of vantage he might find himself nearer to his destination than he had dared to think. After all, he had been travelling many hours since last night's camp.

A little to the right the ledge offered a chance of easy ascent. Close past the face of it McLaggan went floundering desperately, hugging his new hope and refusing to admit to himself for an instant how piteously frail a one it was. His first steps went deeper than he expected. They found no bottom. With a startled cry he threw himself backwards, but too late to extricate himself. His face blinded in the smother of snow, he shot down feet foremost, landed softly, pitched aside sharply to the left into empty space, and fell in a heap, his exhausted muscles refusing to make any further effort whatsoever.

III

Lying there with his eyes shut, McLaggan's first dim thought was: "That settles it! Better here than out there in the damned snow!" He just wanted to go to sleep. But once more that indomitable will of his got busy, and prodded his brain awake. It prodded his senses awake. This

faint warmth enwrapping and reviving him! It was not the fatal illusion of those who are freezing to death. It was something outside himself. He savoured it as he drew in his breath. Then his woods-wise nostrils, long benumbed, suddenly regained their sensitiveness. They sniffed with enlightenment. There was no mistaking that pungent smell! McLaggan realized that he had fallen into the cave of a hibernating bear.

This meant food, strength, salvation! McLaggan's stiff fingers assured themselves that they still clutched his rifle. Stealthily he felt for his knife. It was in his belt. But it was no time for haste or blundering. He stifled the sudden rage of his hunger, silenced his harsh breathing, and listened. He remembered that by this time of year a bear would be nearing the end of its winter sleep and beginning to shake off its torpor. Perhaps this one was awake, and if so, a terrible antagonist at such close quarters! His ears strained intently. He caught a sound of suckling, a faint, small, sleepy whimper of content, a low, slow sound of deep-lunged breathing. The situation was clear to him on the instant. Certainly the owner of the cave was sleeping soundly, not to have been disturbed by his rude invasion of her fond home. McLaggan turned his head towards the direction of the sounds, and presently his eyes managed to distinguish their source.

McLaggan thought swiftly. He knew bears. He knew that, as a rule, it is only the females heavy with young that "hole up" in this way for the winter. He knew that they frequently gave birth to their cubs before the end of their winter sleep. And he had been told by a wise old Indian guide that under such conditions a bear, unless aroused by violence, was quite stupidly gentle and tractable. He thought of his own present weakness. Well, he would take no risks. He must see to it that one shot would settle the matter instantaneously. For already his last spurt of strength and decision was dying down, and he felt a deadly exhaustion stealing over him.

With rifle ready McLaggan crawled close up to that large, obscure form, put out a cautious naked hand, and touched it. It was the silken, furry head of the suckling cub that he touched. The cub gave a little whimper of content at the touch, mistaking it for the mother's caress. The warmth, the softness, a ridiculous sense of security and shieldedness in contrast to the bitter loneliness of death outside the cave, produced an amazing effect on McLaggan in his weakness. He wanted to hug the warm cub to his heart, and maudlin tears welled to his eyes. But fortunately at the same moment another impulse, not only stronger but saner, seized him. He realized that the cub was swallowing warm milk. With a gasp

of greed he thrust his face down into the mother's fur, beside the youngster's head. His eager lips found and closed upon the object of their quest, and in a second more he was drawing warm life into his shrunken veins.

At this stage it was beyond McLaggan's power, or wish, to think. The reaction was too exquisite. He drank, and drank, snuggled against the cub. He was warm at last. He was comfortable beyond the utmost dream of comfort. One foolish hand moved up confidently like a baby's and clutched into the deep fur on the mother's flank. McLaggan, there between the bear's great paws, was dozing off to sleep.

Presently the mother stirred. This unwonted drain upon her resources began to reach her consciousness with its tidings of something out of the ordinary. She lifted her head in a drowsy fashion, craned it about, and sniffed inquiringly at the cub. It was nursing, and whimpered a contented response to her caress. Plainly it was all right. Her great muzzle passed it over, and came in contact with McLaggan's face, glued to one of her teats.

She drew back her muzzle. This was so surprising that she almost woke up. But the hibernating drowsiness was still thick in her veins, clouding her brain. She sniffed at McLaggan again. She did not quite like the smell of him. But on

the other hand she liked well what he was doing. It seemed at once to establish a claim upon her. She was a very big and healthy bear, who in her previous essays in maternity had always achieved twins; and now this one rather puny offspring of hers was not fully absorbing her superabundant milk. McLaggan's greedy demands were comfortable to her. And he was so obviously harmless and friendly. She adopted him complacently. She licked the back of his head for a few seconds, so vigorously that she pushed his cap off; and McLaggan, waking just sufficiently to think he was in a propitious but preposterous dream, clutched her fur more securely and renewed his blessed meal.

Still dimly puzzled, but too drowsy to consider the matter further, the bear gave a satisfied *woof* and settled back to sleep again.

When McLaggan, after hours of deep slumber, woke up again, his first conscious thought was that he felt quite well and strong, but somewhat wearied by dreams. By this time it was night in the world, and the darkness of the cave was absolute. At first McLaggan thought he was in his bunk at the camp. Feeling his face and hands buried in warm, breathing fur, he decided that he was still dreaming, and he lay very quiet, with his eyes shut, striving to keep his hold upon such a curious and interesting dream that he might remember

it in all details. But under this effort his brain flashed clear; and with a jump of his heart he realized exactly where he was. The trained prudence of the woodsman, however, saved that jump of the heart from translating itself to the muscle. For a moment he felt a chill of fear. Very softly he felt for his rifle. Yes, there it was, close at his side, where he had let go of it in order to feed more greedily. He relinquished it again at once, with a curious qualm as if he had been caught in an act of treachery. At least, there was no need of doing anything detestable for the moment. The furry pillow beneath his head was heaving so slowly that he knew the bear was sound asleep. The cub, too, no longer nursing, was asleep. He touched it, and its little paws were folded over its nose. Then he noticed a slight chilly feeling on the back of his head and neck. He felt the place with his hand, and realized that the bear had recently been licking him. She had licked the hair firmly in the wrong direction, and left it moist. At this evidence of the great beast's complacency towards his intruding helplessness, when she might so easily—and justly—have crunched his neck with one lazy snap of her jaws, a wave of gratitude surged up in his heart, followed by a spasm of disgust as he thought of the hateful deed to which he should probably be driven. Every fibre of him now shrank from such a deed. Perhaps

if he could have a smoke some way of escape from it might be revealed to him!

But the lighting of a match, the pungent smell of the pipe! There would be risk of rousing his strange hostess, to a too discriminating wakefulness! However, his confidence grew as he thought of how assiduously she had licked the back of his head. That, he reflected, was nothing short of adoption. He had been accepted and admitted to full cub-ship. He allowed himself to stroke the old bear's head and scratch it softly around the ears; and he was rewarded by a sleepy *woof* of satisfaction.

He sat up, and, leaning back luxuriously against the bear's stomach, proceeded to fill his pipe, feeling very safe and comfortable. Then, rising carefully to his feet without disturbing the cub which had been nestled against him, he groped his way to the exit, which he discovered by plunging his hand into the snow. Here, with his back to the bear, and concealing the flame of the match beneath his coat, he lit the pipe, and stood there blowing every mouthful of the smoke carefully forth through the snow. But here by the opening of the cave he was sharply reminded of the terrors of the outer cold. By the time he had finished his pipe he was chilled to the bone. Gratefully he turned back to his warm retreat and snuggled down again between the old bear's paws. The

cub had resumed its nursing. He promptly followed its example; and having made a good meal he dozed off to sleep again, telling himself it would be time enough in the morning to face decisions. His first need, surely, was to recover his strength!

This time, being deeply at ease in his mind, McLaggan slept long. He woke up very hungry, and at once, by prompt instinct, applied himself thirstily to the copious source of nourishment which had already served him so well. Then, opening his eyes, he found that the cave was full of a faint, glimmering, bluish light, and he realized how long he must have slept. His watch had stopped long ago, forgotten, but it must be well past noon, and a brilliant day in the icy world, to send so much light into his refuge. He looked at the sleeping, shaggy bear. He looked at the sleek little cub, suckling, and snuffling, and kneading its mother's breast with its baby paws. He thought of the ancient story of the viper, which stung the man who had warmed it to life in his bosom. "Not for me, thank you!" he muttered. "I'll fill my skin right up to the neck with your good milk, old girl, and see if I can't make Burnt Brook on that. It can't be far now, and thanks to your hearty hospitality I feel quite fit."

Having swallowed all the milk that he could hold, McLaggan was again filling his pipe, when through the curtain of snow he caught a faint

sound of human voices. Instantly jamming on his cap, and snatching up his rifle and snow-shoes, he dived through the snow, crashed through the branches of the bush, and struggled, spluttering and blowing, to the top of the hole. Before he could get the snow out of his eyes, his ears were greeted with a cry of "Well, I'll be damned! Here he is!"

Two of the "hands" from the camp, Long Jackson and Baldy Davis, grinning broadly with relief through the icicles on their moustaches, and steaming from their nostrils like locomotives, stood before him.

"What's been the matter, Mac?" demanded Baldy Davis.

"Got lost, like a damn fool," answered McLaggan. "Fell in a hole. Broke my snow-shoes. Thank God you've come. But what fetched you along this way?"

"The Boss wanted you to see to something or other for him at the settlement, and phoned in to Curtis's last night. When they said you hadn't turned up, he knowed something was wrong. So he sent Long Jackson an' me out on yer trail afore daylight this mornin', in a hurry; an' you bet we've done some travellin'."

"Thought we'd find you stiff," broke in Jackson. "But you don't *look* dead. What you been doin'?"

"Hugging up to a sleepy-old bear, to keep warm, bless her," explained McLaggan. "Got any grub with you? I want a square feed, and a tin of tea."

"A bear?" cried Davis eagerly, snatching at his gun and starting to slip off his snow-shoes. "Where is he? In that hole?"

"No, you don't, Baldy," snapped McLaggan, sharp as a whip-lash, grabbing Davis savagely by the wrist. "No, you don't! See?"

Then, noticing Davis's astonishment, he continued more mildly: "You see, Baldy, that old bear's my pal. She *adopted* me, that she did, when I was just all in. Why, she's licked my back hair all the wrong way, so hard I don't know as I'll ever get it to lay straight again."

"My mistake. I apologize," responded Davis good-humouredly.

Long Jackson, a woodsman and trapper of experience who had been wont to study the wild kindreds even more intently than he hunted them, divined all McLaggan's experience in a flash.

"I see," said he, nodding his head. "An old she-bear, an' cubs, eh? Too sleepy to know the difference, eh? An' I'll bet you stole the cubs' rations, eh, Mac?"

"Only one cub—and me!" laughed McLaggan. "There was plenty for the two of us. But right now I'd like something solider than warm milk."

"We'll move round yonder into the sun, an'

build a fire, an' have a feed," said Jackson. "Baldy an' me's needin' it most as much as you. Here's an extra pair o' snow-shoes we brought along, case of an accident. We're not more'n two hours from the settlement now."

Snug beside the deeply trenched fire, with bread and bacon between his ribs and a tin of scalding tea in his hand, McLaggan unfolded his adventures.

"So now, you see," he concluded, "I'm a bear by adoption and grace. Do you wonder I've got a soft spot in my heart for the old girl?"

"I guess," said Baldy Davis, chewing thoughtfully on his pipe-stem, "ye'd better not say anything at all about it, not to *nobody*, Mac. There's all kind of folks in at the settlement; an' like as not there'd be some skunk stinkin' mean enough to come right out here after that bear's pelt."

"Baldy's right," grunted Jackson.

McLaggan meditated, scowling darkly. Then he got up, took a snow-shoe, and carefully shovelled back the snow into the hole till there was no sign to distinguish it.

"That's a damn good notion of yours, Baldy," said he. "Mum's the word, till the snow's off. If I got wind of any blasted sinner messing round after that there bear, before she's out an' around and able to take care of herself, I'd break his neck for him, that I would."

IN THE MOOSE-YARD

I

FROM across the wide, wooded valley of the lone Tin Kettle, borne clearly on the frosty and sparkling air, came the sharp sounds of axe-strokes biting rhythmically into solid timber.

The great moose bull, who had been drowsing in the dusky depths of the fir thicket, beside his hump-shouldered cow and her two long-muzzled, leggy calves, shot his big ears forwards like an apprehensive rabbit, lifted his huge, ungainly head, distended his moist nostrils, and sniffed anxiously. They were so super-sensitive, those expert nostrils, and the wilderness air was so clean, that even across the wide expanse he could detect the acrid tang of wood-smoke. Heaving up his black bulk with no more noise than if he had been a shadow, he parted the branches cautiously with his long muzzle and peered forth.

It took him but very few moments to realize what had happened. The lumbermen had come back to the old, long-deserted camp across the valley. All winter through, the valley would ring with rough voices, with the sharp percussion of the axe-

strokes, the jangle of chains and harness, and the snorting of busy teams. It would be a bad neighbourhood for the moose. Therefore, though the valley was a comfortable one for his winter quarters, the wise old bull wasted no time in coming to a decision. In a few throaty rumblings this decision was conveyed to the cow and calves. And with fierce resentment in his heart he led the way back into the depths of the forest, back, far back from the place of sudden peril. He would find his family a new home, remote and secure from the hungry pot-hunters of the camp.

The snow had held off unusually late that season, and even now, at the beginning of December, it was hardly a foot deep on the level. Moreover it was dry and light, so the going was easy for the migrant family. Travelling at a long, effortless trot, which seemed slow but nevertheless covered ground amazingly, the little procession pushed, in ghostly silence, deeper and deeper into the white, colonnaded glades of the fir forest. From time to time some drooping branch, snow-burdened, stirred at their shadowy passing and shook down its thick white powder upon their dark hides. Sometimes a startled snow-shoe rabbit leaped into the air almost beneath the great black leader's nose, bounded aside, and sat up, unafraid, on his haunches, with waving ears, to watch the inoffensive travellers go by. And once a big grey lynx,

meeting them suddenly, clawed up into a tree with a snarl and glared down upon them with round, moon-like, savage eyes, itching to drop upon the neck of the smaller calf, but well aware of the doom which would follow such rashness.

By sunset the travellers had put leagues of difficult country between themselves and the dreaded lumbermen. The wise old bull was not content, however, for he knew that the trail behind them was plain as a beaten highway. But he judged it time for a halt. While the shadows crept long and level and violet-black across the snowy glades, and the westward sides of the tree-tops were stained red-gold with the wash of the flaming sky, the travellers browsed hungrily on the fragrant twigs of the young birch and poplar trees and the sweet buds of the striped-maple saplings. Then in the fast-gathering dusk they all lay down to rest and ruminate for an hour or two, under the branches of a wide-spreading hemlock. A morose old porcupine, hunched up in a crotch above their heads, squeaked crossly and grated his long yellow teeth at this intrusion upon his solitude. But they had no quarrel with the porcupine, and only the two inquisitive calves took the trouble to glance up at the source of the strange noises.

Two or three hours later, when the moon rose, the forest became all black and silver and ethereal blue; and under the spectral gleams and through

the sharp, distorting shadows the fugitives resumed their flight. Presently they emerged from the wooded country and crossed a low, bleak ridge of granite and scrub where the snow had been swept away, except from the clefts and hollows, by a recent gale. Traversing this harsh region in haste, the great bull led the way down the further slope, and reached once more the shelter of a belt of fir woods.

The night-sky by this time had become thickly overcast, till the only light was from the wide, vague glimmer of the sheeted earth. And now snow began to fall,—a thick still fall of small flakes, which the weather-wise bull knew was the kind of snowfall that would last for many hours, if not for days. He knew that it would speedily cover up the trail behind him. The immediate danger from the pot-hunters of the lumber camp—who care little for the game-laws—being thus removed, he led the way into the shelter of the trees; and once more the little party, this time with unanxious hearts, lay down to sleep in the soft and muffled dark.

Not yet, however, was the crafty bull content with his distance from the lumber-camp. His destination was clear in his mind's eye,—a region of low-lying land, of mixed swampy barren and stunted birch-woods, dotted with shallow ponds, and producing no timber of a growth to tempt the

axes of the lumbermen. All the following morning he pressed on with his tiny herd, keeping his direction unerringly though the snow fell so thickly that no landmarks could be detected. Early in the afternoon the snow ceased, the white-grey sky changed to a sharp and steely blue, and the sun shone dazzlingly, bringing not warmth, however, but an intense and snapping cold. The dead-white wastes flashed into a blinding sparkle of diamond points. And then, when the first thin rose of approaching sunset was beginning to flush the shining glades, he reached the place of his desire.

Close in the hollow, southward-facing curve of a dense fir copse, overtopped by a group of tall hemlocks, the bull proceeded to establish his new winter home. Here, beneath the wide branches of the hemlocks, was a dry shelter shielded from the fiercest winds by the thick, surrounding screen of young firs; and here, too, was abundant forage, in the stunted birch, poplar and willow which dotted the levels outside the copse. For the moment the moose family chose to pasture on the low berry bushes and coarse herbage, which they could still get at easily by pawing away the snow. But they knew that it was now only a matter of days before the great winter storms would set in, and the snow would gather to a depth of five or six feet on the level, making all movement slow and toilsome for their heavy bulks.

It was with forethought of these storms to come that the prudent bull, aided by his cow, set about the establishment of their winter quarters. To the woodman these winter quarters of the moose are known as a "moose-yard." In the lay mind a "moose-yard" is pictured as a sort of wild farm-yard, surrounded by walls of the deep untrodden snow instead of farm buildings, the snow within it all trodden flat or pawed clear, wherein the moose family passes the winter pasturing precariously on such branches as hang within reach. But it is nothing of the sort. Except for the clear space under the trees, serving as sleeping quarters, it is rather a maze than a yard. It consists of an intricate labyrinth of deeply trodden, narrow paths, winding this way and that to touch every bush, every sapling, every thicket which affords the moose suitable browsing. These paths are trampled free after each heavy snowfall, and extended, laboriously as the supply of provender nearest home begins to run short. Threading these labyrinths the moose move freely and at ease; and only under sternest compulsion will they break out into the soft, six-foot deeps of the snow, where they flounder to their bellies and are at the mercy of foes whom at other times they would utterly scorn.

For a couple of days now, the little moose family had fine weather, giving them time to settle

down, and to tread out their trails to all the choicest thickets. Then the snow set in, in earnest. For four whole days it snowed, steadily, thickly, blindingly, as it only can snow when it tries on the high barrens of northern New Brunswick. All the wilderness world was muffled in a white silence. The moose were kept busy trampling out the paths that they might not be utterly obliterated. In the course of this task the great bull shed his mighty and magnificent but no longer needed antlers. He had grown them, in all their formidable splendour, during the past summer, for the sole purpose of battling with his rivals in the mating season; for against other adversaries he used no weapons except his knife-edged, pile-driving fore-hoofs. For weeks, the network of copious blood vessels at the roots of his antlers, which had nourished their marvellous growth, had been shrinking and drying up. And now, whether of their own weight or at the pull of an overhanging branch, they dropped off, painlessly, and were buried in the snow. The bull merely shook his huge head for a moment or two, as if surprised; and then went on with his trail-breaking, glad to be relieved of the useless burden.

II

Winter, having started so late and so halfheartedly, now seemed to repent its irresolution,

and set itself with redoubled rigour to make up for lost time. Storm succeeded furious storm, with intervals of clear, still weather and cold of an intensity that appeared to draw down unmitigated from the spaces of Polar night. Never had the old bull known so savage a winter. But for him and his little family, hardy, well-sheltered from all the winds, and with abundant provender always in reach, neither driving storm nor deathly frost had any special terrors. They fed, grunted, ruminated, slept, blew great clouds of steamy breath from their hot red nostrils, and patiently abided the far-off coming of spring.

Not so, however, the other dwellers of the wilderness,—excepting always, of course, the supremely indifferent porcupine, who, so long as he can find plenty of hemlock twigs and bark to stuff his belly with, pays little heed to cold or heat, to sunshine or black blizzard. The weasels, foxes, lynxes, fishers, all were famishing; for the rabbits, their staple food, were scarce that year, and the grouse and ptarmigan, appalled at the bitterness of the cold, took to burrowing their way deep into the snow-drifts for warmth,—so deep that their scent was lost, and they slept secure from the fiercely digging paws of their hunters. As for the bears, most of them had “holed up” discreetly at the first of the storms, and now, in little rocky caves, or dens hollowed beneath the roots of some

great fallen tree, under a six-foot blanket of snow were comfortably sleeping away the evil time. But a few old males, morose and restless, had as usual refrained from hibernating; and these now, gaunt and savage with hunger, prowled the smitten waste incessantly, ripping rotten tree-trunks open for a poor mouthful of wood-grubs or frost-numbered ants, and filling their paunches with twigs and bitter lichens. One of these fierce wanderers, maddened with his pangs, so far forgot his woods-lore as to pounce upon a plump porcupine and, in spite of its stinging spines, wolf it down greedily. It was his last meal of any sort. His mouth, nose, throat and paws were stuck full of the deadly spines, so barbed that, although he could rub them off, the long needle points remained and swiftly worked their way inwards. These would presently have caused his death, a lingering one; but two or three of the quills which had got down into his stomach were merciful and did their work more quickly. A few days later his lean body, frozen stiff, was found, doubled up in the heart of a spruce thicket, by a pair of prowling lynxes, who thereafter fared sumptuously every day until rumour of the prize got abroad; when foxes, wolverenes and fishers came flocking to the feast and made short work of the huge carcass.

It was this same hunger-madness, too, which drove another bear to the perilous venture of an

attack upon the moose-yard. Seeking a new hunting-ground, he had wandered unhappily out to the edge of the barrens, hoping that there he might have better luck than in the deep of the woods. As he drew near the moose-yard he was thrilled to see some signs of life in the otherwise lifeless waste. There were fresh fox tracks and weasel tracks, with now and again the great pad-marks of a foraging lynx. The unconcerned moose-family, well-fed and comfortable in their sheltered quarters, had a vain fascination for all the ravenous wanderers. The moose-yard afforded asylum to half a dozen pairs of impudent little Canada jays, or "moose-birds," who hopped and pecked fearlessly about the trodden ground, and frequently roosted on the backs of their lordly hosts, warming their toes in the long, coarse hair and exploring it with their beaks for insect-prey. Once in a while a reckless weasel or fox would dart down into the "yard" and try to catch one of these self-confident birds. But the jays, screaming derision, would fly up into the branches overhead; the cow moose, more nervous and short of temper than the great bull, would strike out angrily at the intruder; and one of the calves, always ready for a diversion, would rush at him and chase him from the sanctuary. For the moose disliked the smell of all the hunting beasts.

Stealing warily up-wind, the famished bear at

last caught the smell of moose, and knew that he was approaching a moose-yard. Now in an ordinary winter, with food fairly abundant, and hunting reasonably easy, he would have turned aside at this smell to avoid tantalizing himself with the unattainable. But now, when he was close on starving, it was another matter. His lean jaws watered at the thought of warm red meat. For merely one taste of it what risk would he not face? And the bull presiding over this particular moose-yard *might*, possibly, be a weakling.

But however rash his venture, he did not go about it rashly. His desperation only made him the more cautious. There was so infinitely much at stake. Sinking himself deep into the snow he wound his way forwards soundlessly, and, behind the screen of a thick fir bush lifted his black head to reconnoitre. In a flash, however, he sank down again and shrank back deep into the snow, every nerve quivering with fierce hope. The long muzzle of the younger moose-calf had appeared over the edge of the snow wall a few feet away, and was pulling vigorously at the branches of a poplar sapling.

The bear knew something of moose-yards. He knew that, while he himself was hampered by the deep, soft snow, his intended prey had the well-trodden paths to move in, and could make swift

escape, at the least alarm, back to the protection of its mother and the gigantic bull. As he could see by the violent rocking of the poplar the calf was very busy and engrossed. He worked his way stealthily a little to one side, still shielded by the dense fir bush, till he was within five or six feet of the unsuspecting calf. Then, gathering beneath him all the force of his mighty haunches, he hurled himself forwards and burst into the deep pathway. From the corner of its eye the calf glimpsed a huge and dreadful black form looming over it, and with a squeal of terror turned to flee. But in the same fraction of a second it was struck down, with its frail back broken at a single blow.

Famished as he was, the bear could not resist the temptation to delay for one brief instant, while he tore a throbbing mouthful from the victim's throat and gulped it down. Then he dragged his prize back behind the shelter of the fir bush, and went floundering off with it in desperate haste through the snow, hoping that he had not been seen.

But the hope was a vain one. The bull and the cow had been lying down. At the calf's cry they had shot to their feet. Their furious eyes had marked the slaughter. In deadly silence, ignoring the paths and breasting down the barriers of snow irresistibly, they came charging to the ven-

geance, the stiff black hair of their necks on end with rage.

The bear, hampered though he was by the depth of the snow and by his unwieldy burden, had wallowed onwards for some forty yards or so before the avengers overtook him. The cow, in her outraged mother fury, was a little in advance of her huge mate. What she lacked in stature she made up in nimbleness and in swift hate. When she was almost upon him the bear wheeled like a flash upon his haunches and struck at her,—a terrific, sweeping blow which, had it reached its mark, would have shattered her slim fore-leg like a pipe-stem. But she swerved, and it flew past her; and in the next breath she struck. It was a long-range stroke, and she was away again, lightly, out of reach; but the fierce thud upon his ribs jerked a squealing cough from his throat, and the knife-edged hoof tore a long red gash down his flank. Before he could retaliate the bull was towering over him, from the other side. With a desperate leap he evaded that onslaught, hurling himself clear over the body of his victim. Then, realizing himself overmatched, he fled, his tremendous muscles driving him through the snow like a steam-plough.

The cow stopped short at the body of her calf, sniffing at it anxiously, and licking it, and trying to coax it back to life. But the bull plunged onwards in pursuit of the fleeing slayer. With his

great length of stride he had the advantage of the bear in that depth of snow, and speedily overtook him. The latter whirled about once more to meet the attack, but as he did so the snow beneath him, upborne on the spreading tops of a clump of flat juniper bushes, gave way treacherously, and he fell sprawling backwards, clawing wildly, into a little hollow. Before he could recover, the bull was upon him. One great hoof pounded down upon him irresistibly, catching him fair in the defenceless belly and knocking the wind clean out of him. The next stroke smashed his forearm. As he surged and heaved beneath those deadly strokes, in an agonized struggle to regain his feet, the cow arrived. And there in the dreadful smother of snow and branches his life was slashed and trampled out of him. Not until the thing lying in the trodden and crimsoned snow bore no longer any resemblance to a bear did the victorious moose feel their vengeance satiated. Then at length they turned, and slowly, in the reaction from their rage, ploughed their way back to their home yard, avoiding, as they went, the spot where the dead calf lay stiffening in the snow. The moose-birds, chattering approval, fluttered down from the hemlock, and hopped about them, scrutinizing their blood-stained legs with dark, impudent, bright eyes. And the elder calf, a lanky female now approaching the dignity of a two-year-old, who had

watched with startled gaze the progress of the battle, greeted them with delighted snorts and nuzzlings. Her mother received these demonstrations with indifference. But the great black bull, in his triumph, accepted and returned them with lordly condescension, dimly sensing a time when the youngster would be grown up. Had she been of his own sex, a possible future rival, he would have haughtily ignored her transports, or brusquely rebuffed them. Except in mating season the moose is little apt to be demonstrative.

In a magically short time—so swiftly through the frozen silences travels the news of food,—the solitude around the moose-yard was broken up. The neighbourhood became a place of resort. First arrived the hungry red foxes and the snakily darting white weasels, to gnaw and tear at the great carcasses in the snow, and snarl at each other with jealous hate. These small marauders, though not often in evidence, had never been far from the moose-yard, for they had instinctively anticipated some tragedy which they might profit by. Soon afterwards came three gaunt grey lynxes, driven by hunger, in spite of their morose and solitary instincts, to hunt together with a view to attacking quarry otherwise too powerful for them. They drove off the foxes and weasels while they gorged themselves. But one fox, a late arrival, venturing too near in his eagerness to share the feast, was

pounced upon and devoured. At length appeared another famished bear; and all the feasters, great and small alike, sullenly made way for him, knowing the lightning swiftness of his clumsy-looking paw. He sniffed ravenously at the mangled body of his kinsman, but being no cannibal, turned away in disappointment and disgust. The moose-calf, on the other hand, was just what he wanted. Squatting over it jealously he made a sumptuous meal. Then, ignoring the other darting and prowling banqueters, he lugged away the substantial remnants of the calf, to hide them in his far-off lair in the heart of a cedar swamp.

To all this hungry stir, to all this yapping and snarling, the moose in their sheltered yard paid no attention whatever, but went on browsing or drowsing as their mood dictated. Only when the bear arrived did they take notice, and grow angrily alert. As long as the bear remained upon the scene they kept to the centre of the yard, the great bull stamping and snorting from time to time to show his readiness for battle. But when the bear waddled off with his prize, the stiff-legged, mutilated thing which had been a moose-calf, they once more fell unconcernedly to their browsing.

Days later, when at last nothing was left in that trodden snow-hollow but scattered tufts of black fur and a pinky-white skeleton gnawed and pol-

ished clean, silence once more descended upon the glittering white spaces about the moose-yard. By night the cold was still of a savage intensity; but the days were growing longer, and in the sun's rays at noon-time there was a perceptible warmth. The result was a hard crust upon the surface of the snow,—a crust so strong that all but the heavier creatures of the wild could move about upon it easily and swiftly. And now, ravaging down across it from their famine-stricken north, came the wolves. Not for nearly fifty years had these fierce and crafty slayers been seen in New Brunswick. They came not in great packs, as in lands where they expect to hunt great game, but rather in small bands of four or five, or at most eight or ten, scattering over a wide range of country, and disdaining no quarry, however humble. Before them, on every side, spread panic. Only the moose family, sequestered and indifferent, knew nothing of it.

Then, one still and bitter morning, a band of four of the grey invaders caught scent of the moose-yard, and swept down upon it with their dreadful, quavering hunting-cry. At sight of these strange galloping beasts, with their long jaws and deadly fangs, the first impulse of the moose family was to flee. But the old bull, though he knew nothing of wolves, saw at once that flight would be instantly fatal. Conveying this in some

way to his two charges, so effectively that they steadied themselves at once and closed up to him, he wheeled with a loud snort and stood to face the terrible attack. The cow promptly ranged herself beside him, while the trembling two-year-old thrust herself in between them.

The wolves, for all their hunger, were wary. They halted abruptly at the edge of the yard, impressed by the tall and lowering bulk of the bull and by the dangerous calm of his defiance. After a moment's hesitation they divided, two to the right and two to the left, and went loping stealthily around the rim of the central space, leaping the deep paths and, obviously, awaiting some sign of irresolution before dashing in. But presently one of them caught sight or scent of that heap of fresh-picked bones in the blood-stained hollow, and all together they galloped over to investigate. They knew very well that if, in the meantime, those defiant beasts in the moose-yard should take to flight, it would be a simple matter to trail them and run them down.

But nothing was further from the proud old bull's thought than any such madness. Shaking his massive head angrily with ever growing confidence he watched the wolves as they fell with zest upon the bones of his ancient foe.

To the powerful jaws of the wolves the bare bones were a feast. All but the very biggest they

cracked and crunched up, gulping down great morsels with the marrow and fresh juice. But, of course, even for them it was comparatively slow work, for a bear's bones are hard and tough. Not till well along in the afternoon had they finished the job; and then, though no longer famished, they were still healthily hungry. One after another they returned to the moose-yard, and began stealthily prowling about it, more deliberate now, but not less murderously determined. The moose, now even more defiant than before, faced them sullenly and watchfully, the bull fronting one way, the cow the other, with the unwarlike two-year-old between them.

To the wolves it was clear that the vulnerable point in the moose-family's defense was this trembling youngster. If they could stampede her off from her formidable protectors they could make an easy kill of her out in the snow. Suddenly they darted down into the yard from three sides at once. Two made a cunning feint at the bull, one at the cow,—while the fourth sprang straight at the youngster's throat. But the cow, quicker than thought, met the latter's charge with a side slash full in the face, which shattered both his jaws; and in the same instant she swung lightly to confront her own more wary assailant.

The stricken wolf, half-stunned, and wounded to the death, picked himself up, scrambled dazedly

forth upon the snow, and staggered off. His three companions, taken aback at this evidence of a moose's fighting powers, sprang discreetly out of reach. They paused for a moment to glare at their hoped-for victim, then galloped after their wounded fellow, threw themselves upon him, and tore him to pieces. A wounded wolf, in their eyes, was of no use whatever except to afford his kinsmen a meal. Having finished their cannibalistic repast they turned their tails upon the moose-yard, and loped away through the gathering violet dusk to look for hunting less perilous and more profitable.

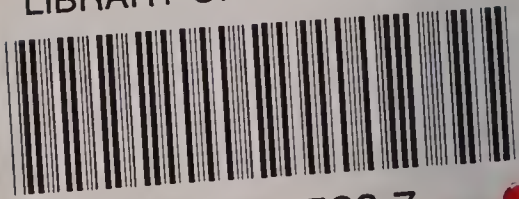
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When spring drew near, heralded by melting rains and swift thaws and ardent noonday suns, the deep snow shrank with amazing speed. The air grew musical with the sound of myriad unseen rivulets, mining their tunnels beneath the vast white overlay. The buds on poplar, willow and birch grew succulent and aromatic, waiting the hour to burst into a film of green. The moose became restless, breaking new paths ever wider and wider afield to sample the freshening provender. Presently their impudent little pensioners, the moose-birds, forsook them, pair by pair, intent on new enterprise in the reawakening world. Soon afterwards, when the grey, decaying snow

was no longer more than foot deep anywhere on the levels, the tall bull, suddenly tiring of the charges whom he had so valiantly protected the winter through, strode off without so much as a grunt of farewell, and disappeared in the fir woods. The cow and her two-year-old daughter lingered on in the yard, food being abundant, for yet another couple of weeks. Then the cow, too, was seized with the wandering fever. And as she was not going to have a calf that spring,—having borne one for three seasons in succession,—she lazily permitted the anxious two-year-old to accompany her. Through the wet, earth-scented, swiftly greening world they wandered on, aimlessly, till they came to a little, secluded lake, with dense coverts and good browsing about its shores, and the promise of abundant water-lilies along its oozy brink. And here, well content with the comfortable solitude, they took up their dwelling for the summer,

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